

# Zion's Gates and the King's Highway - Part 2

by J.C. Philpot

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*The sermon emphasizes the importance of passing through the gates of faith, hope, and love before entering the presence of the great King, and the role of the servants of God in preparing the way and casting up the highway for the people to safely travel.*

**Scripture:** Isaiah 26:2, Isaiah 35:8, Jeremiah 3:22, Hosea 2:15, Hosea 14:4, Zechariah 4:7, Romans 5:1-8, 2 Thessalonians 2:16, Hebrews 6:19

**Topics:** "Faith And Hope", "Spiritual Guidance"

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## Description

J.C. Philpot preaches about the gates that need to be opened in the journey of faith, starting with the gate of hope, which is anchored in a good hope through grace and leads to a living faith in Jesus. He emphasizes the importance of passing through the gates of faith, hope, and love before entering the presence of the King. The sermon highlights the role of ministers in preparing the way for God's people, casting up a highway of truth, gathering out stumbling blocks, and lifting up the standard of the Gospel for guidance and protection.

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## Transcript

3. Now comes another gate which has to be opened; and this is the gate of hope. Of this we read in the prophecy of Hosea, where the promise runs, "And I will give her vineyards from thence, and the valley of Achor for a door of hope" Ho 2:15. This door of hope is the same as the apostle calls "a good hope through grace" 2Th 2:16, and which he declares to be "an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which entereth into that within the veil" Heb 6:19. But you may say, "Have you not made a mistake this morning? How is it you put hope after faith? Why don't you put hope first? Is not this the way that the Lord deals with his people-to give them first a little hope, and then, after hope is raised up in their hearts to reveal his dear Son, and thus communicate a living faith in him?" No, I think I have made no mistake. I don't like to make mistakes in solemn matters of this kind. I should not be able to go through the gates to open them to the people, if I did not know pretty well how the gates stand one after another. I should be at best but a blind guide or a sleepy watchman. But as you have asked me one question, let me ask you another. How can we hope in what we do not believe? Faith is "the substance of things hoped for", that is, their foundation, as the word means; but which stands first, the foundation or the superstructure? Does not the apostle say, "Hope that is seen is not hope: for what a man seeth, why doth he yet hope for?" Ro 8:24. But faith gives eyes, for it is "the evidence of things not seen". Thus faith is the evidence and hope the expectation. But how can we expect a thing of which we have no evidence that it exists? How can you

hope in the goodness of God unless you believe in that goodness? How can you hope in salvation by the Son of God, if you have never believed in the Son of God, through whom salvation comes? Or how can you have an anchor of the soul both sure and steadfast within the veil, unless first by faith you have laid hold of him who has passed within the veil, as the great High Priest over the house of God? The apostle tells us in the Epistle to the Romans that "experience worketh hope" Ro 5:4. But what experience? An experience of the goodness and mercy of God, which can only come by faith. He also tells us that "being justified by faith", "we rejoice in hope of the glory of God" Ro 5:1,2. But this justification must precede any rejoicing in hope; for what have we to rejoice in except what is laid hold of by a living faith? Thus we see we must pass through the gate of faith so as to believe in the name of the only begotten Son of God, before we can pass through the door of hope, there to anchor firmly within the veil.

This gate, too, the servant of God has to open by setting forth the promises of the gospel, and especially by describing and explaining the experience of God's people; for as "experience worketh hope", when they hear their experience described, it works hope in their heart. Thus as he holds in his hand the gate of hope, swaying it, so to speak, backwards and forwards on its hinges, a stream of heavenly light bursts through it upon their soul, and "a good hope through grace", springing up in their hearts, they pass through it, still pressing forward to the king's palace.

Now, though I say that faith goes before hope, I do not mean to assert that the assurance of faith precedes it. In this way, therefore, we may reconcile the difficulty which probably struck your mind when I put the gate of faith before the gate of hope; for we have often a good hope through grace before the Spirit seals on the soul the fullness of God's love.

4. But this brings us to another gate which has still to be opened, and a blessed one it is, for it gives admission to the very palace of the King. This gate is the gate of love. Now though we do not find in scripture express mention of a door of love, as of a door of faith and of hope, yet we do read of "a door being opened in heaven" Re 4:1; and if a door is opened in heaven, what must flow through that open door but love from him who sits in heaven's citadel, and from those glorious heights sends down his love into the heart? Has not Jesus passed within the veil as our glorious Forerunner? Is not that veil still open? For have not the children of God who enter through the gate of faith "boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which he hath consecrated for us through the veil, that is to say, his flesh?" Heb 10:19,20. Are we not also bidden to "set our affections on things above, not on things on the earth?" Col 3:2. And is not all this a warrant for me to say that there is a gate of love as well as those which I have already mentioned? How can love come down unless there be an open door? How can love go up except through an open door? Martyred Stephen cried, "Behold, I see the heavens opened." Did no love flow up or down? When "the beloved put in his hand by the hole of the door", was not this the hand of love? It must have been so by its effects, for it made the bride cry out, "I charge you, O daughters of Jerusalem, if ye find my beloved, that ye tell him that I am sick of love" So 5:4,8.

We have gone through the gates. There is none beyond the last; for "God is love, and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him" 1Jo 4:16. Now look, then, at these gates and see how many you have passed through, or whether you have passed through any one of them. Look at the first gate, the strait and narrow gate, which leads to eternal life. Have you passed through that? What struggles, difficulties, or conflicts did you experience; what sighs, cries, prayers, groans, tears went up out of your soul as you seemed to stick in that narrow pass; when, as the scripture speaks, you "came to the birth, and there was not strength to bring forth"; that perilous time when death seems to hover over mother and child. Did the Lord then fulfil his promise in your heart, "Shall I bring to the birth and not cause to bring

forth?"

Have you passed through the next gate - the gate of faith? Has the Lord Jesus Christ ever been manifested to your soul or revealed to your heart, so that you can truly say you believe in the name of the only begotten Son of God, by some gracious discovery of his Person and work to your believing eye, whereby you beheld "his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth"?

Have you ever passed through the gate of hope? Has the Lord the Spirit ever let down a sweet promise into your soul, applied any passage warm to your heart; or as the servant of God went before, and the Lord "spoke comfortably" by him, did he even open a door of hope in your soul, whereby you felt a sweet persuasion of your interest in the love and blood of the Lamb?

Have you ever passed through the gate of love, so as to embrace the Lord Jesus Christ in the arms of faith and affection, and to be able to say, with all sincerity of heart, "Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee?" Now these gates must be passed through before you can get into the presence of the great King, for in the very heart of the city he dwells, as we read, "Beautiful for situation, the joy of the whole earth, is mount Zion, on the sides of the north, the city of the great King. God is known in her palaces for a refuge" Ps 48:2,3. There he keeps palace; there he sits on his throne of grace, as David sat in his royal palace of Zion, swaying his peaceful sceptre over believing hearts. But these gates must first be passed through: "Go through, go through the gates." "Open ye the gates, that the righteous nation," God's justified people, "which keepeth the truth" -the truth of God made precious to their heart-may enter in-not stand without Isa 26:2. For bear in mind that these gates not only admit, but also exclude; not only give access to his gracious Majesty, to adore and love his holy name, but shut out all intruders. So before you can get into the presence of the King, to see his beauty, behold his glory, and enjoy his love, you must pass through them all one after the other.

But this is not the only work that the servants of God are commissioned to perform. The message to them goes on, "Prepare ye the way of the people."

The "people" here spoken of are the people of God; the people for whom Jesus died; the people whose names are written in the Book of Life; the people whom the Lord has formed for himself that they may show forth his praise. But these people are represented in a state wherein they require spiritual guidance, as being unable of themselves to find their way to the city. They are thus like the sheep spoken of by the prophet, as "wandering through all the mountains and upon every high hill"; yea, as "scattered upon all the face of the earth, and none to search or seek after them".

Now, for this people as thus "scattered in the cloudy and dark day" Eze 34:6 Eze 34:12, the servants of God are bidden to prepare the way, the way that leads to the strong city; for until this way is pointed out to them and made plain before their eyes, through the darkness of their mind, the confusion of their thoughts, and the hard bondage with which they are exercised, they scarcely know where to set their feet, or in what direction the road lies. There is an allusion in the words, "Prepare ye the way," to a practice in Eastern countries, where there are not, as in our civilised land, beaten, well-known roads in all directions. When kings and princes travel there, especially when they move at the head of armies, roads have to be made for them. The deep rivers have to be bridged, the jungle cut through, the woods levelled, the swamps and morasses filled up, and a clear, clean, broad way made, that they may not be stopped on their route by these natural obstructions. Taking, then, this figure, the Holy Spirit commands the servants of God to "prepare the way of the people"

But how do the servants of God ministerially execute this office? How did John the Baptist prepare the way of the people when he went before Christ as his forerunner? He preached repentance to them. So the servants of God prepare the way of the people by setting before them their lost condition by nature. They preach the law in its spirituality and curse; they set before them the wrath of God due to every sinner that comes into the world under the curse of the original transgression. They tell them they must repent of their sins and believe in Jesus Christ in order to salvation, as the apostle preached in his day "repentance toward God and faith toward the Lord Jesus Christ" Ac 20:21. They tell the people there must be a work of grace upon their heart, that a mighty revolution must take place in their soul, wrought in them by the power of God; that Christ must be revealed and formed in them, the hope of glory, before they can be saved.

Thus by setting before the people their ruin and misery in a state of nature, and showing the curse and spirituality of God's law, they prepare their way, for as the word falls with power upon their conscience they listen to it, and flee from the wrath to come. This is as if a marking out of the way before the people's eyes; a setting it out, which is the first thing to be done in making a road. They prepare the way also by levelling the obstacles and difficulties that lie in the path. They tell them there is salvation for all those who repent of their sins, and believe in the name of the only begotten Son of God. They tell them that God is love in the Person and work of his dear Son. They tell them that the sin of all who believe is put away by the bloodshedding of the Son of God; that a righteousness is provided for all who come to him by a living faith; that the Holy Spirit is given to those who belong to Jesus, to lead and guide them in all truth. They set before them the love of God in sending his dear Son, the infinite compassion of his merciful heart, and the way which he devised in the depth of his eternal wisdom of saving sinners, without sacrificing or infringing any one of his holy attributes. But they chiefly prepare the way by preaching Christ as "the way", the only way unto God.

And thus sometimes by thundering the law in their ears, sometimes by preaching the gospel, sometimes by unfolding the lost, ruined state of man, and sometimes by bringing before their eyes the blood and obedience of the Son of God, they prepare the way of the people, and instrumentally and ministerially go before, and lead them in it. Thus they bridge over the deep rivers, drain the swamps and morasses, cut down the thick forests in which the people might lose themselves, run a road across the jungle which otherwise the weak and feeble of the Lord's family could scarcely struggle through; and thus as good workmen who need not be ashamed, they make the way plain before the face of all who are made willing in the day of the Lord's power.

But they have other work to do, and this is expressly enjoined upon them by a reduplication of the command, "Cast up, cast up the highway." When they have prepared the way by bridging the rivers, cutting down the forests, draining the morasses, and burning up the jungle, then they are to take the pickaxe and spade, and labour hard to "cast up the highway", that this glorious highway may stand prominently before the people's eyes, that they may plant their feet upon it, walk on it safe from floods, the incursions of wild beasts, and the attacks of enemies, as being on firm, high ground from which they cannot be easily dislodged.

In some of the Oxfordshire and Berkshire villages, and most probably in other localities less known by me, where they are liable to floods, we often see raised causeways of large stones, on which people travel in winter when the roads and meadows are covered with water. So, in a spiritual sense, there is "a highway" a causeway to be cast up to preserve the people of God from the various floods which often threaten them with destruction. Such are the floods of Almighty vengeance which will one day rush down like waterspouts from heaven's open gates; the floods of sin which sweep over a guilty conscience; the floods

of temptation out of the mouth of the dragon, which often threaten to bury them in destruction and perdition. Now the Lord's people want "a highway" on which they may safely travel, raised above all these devastating floods; and this the servants of God are called upon ministerially to cast up.

But how do they cast up this highway? You will observe that it must be an elevated way, that the people may stand and walk on it above the devastating floods. It must, therefore, not be built of mud, or earth, or clay, which the floods might sweep away. It must be of good solid work-sound stones well laid in their places. When, then, the servants of God bring forth the precious, glorious truth of a three-one God-Father, Son and Holy Ghost-in one undivided Essence, and lay this clearly and broadly before the people as the sum and substance of all divine revelation, as the sole object of all their spiritual worship, the life of all their real religion, the solid ground of all their faith, the fulfilment of all their hope, and the ultimate enjoyment of all their love, then they make a sound and good beginning in casting up the highway.

When they bring forth the Deity and eternal Sonship of our blessed Lord, in union with his spotless humanity, thus setting before the people his glorious Person as Immanuel, God with us, and lay this divine truth down before their eyes, it is casting up the highway and making the foundation broad and good, for it is "the foundation of the apostles and prophets", and of every master builder in Zion; for, "other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ" 1Co 3:11 Eph 2:20. When they bring forth the "everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and sure", and hold it up before the people's eyes, as "the volume of the book", in which all the firm decrees of God are written, showing thereby the security of the saints, and the certainty of every event coming to pass which God has appointed for their good and his glory, then also they cast up the highway, as laying in their right place the solid stones each of which fits into the other, and are thus immovable by all the floods which may beat against them.

When they set forth the atoning blood of the Lamb of God as cleansing from all sin; his spotless obedience as a perfect robe of righteousness; his dying love as a most blessed cordial for a fainting spirit; his meritorious sufferings and death as a ransom from the curse of the law, the power of darkness, the kingdom of Satan, the dominion of the grave, and the torments of hell, then, too, they cast up a causeway firm and good-the highway, the King's highway, on which the royal seed travel safely above all the floods of devouring wrath. When, too, they bring forth the promises, all of which are "Yea and amen in Christ Jesus to the glory of God by us" 2Co 1:20; such as, "All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out" Joh 6:37; "All things work together for good to those that love God; .... He that believeth and is baptised shall be saved;"-I need not, cannot go through them all: but as they bring forth promise after promise, and lay them down one after another close and thick, or pile them up high and strong, what a good and solid road they make-what a firm highway do they cast up.

So when they bring forth the exhortations, the invitations, and the comforting addresses of which God's word is so full, such as, "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest;" or, "Look unto me and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth;" and interlace them with the strongest assurances of the faithfulness of the Lord to every word he has ever spoken, then, too they cast up the King's highway and make it broad and good. When also they bring forth the precepts of God's word as well as the promises, and contend for and enforce the power of vital godliness in heart, lip, and life; when they set forth the ordinances of God's house in their due order, and lay them down broadly and plainly by pointing out to whom alone they belong; and when they grout the whole road well from beginning to end with the warm cement of living Christian experience, then also they cast up the King's highway with a skilful, firm, and vigorous hand.

See what a highway it is; how raised above the wintry floods, the roaring lions, the howling wolves, and the prowling jackals; for "No lion shall be there, nor any ravenous beast shall go up thereon, it shall not be found there" Isa 35:9. O what a safe and blessed highway! What glorious doctrines, precious promises, heavenly invitations, wise admonitions, holy precepts, gracious ordinances, and the whole built up and cemented together with a living experience! Well may the Lord say to his servants, and double the word, to impress it more deeply on their hearts, "Cast up, cast up the highway."

But let both minister and hearer bear this well in mind, that the King's highway is "a way of holiness", for this is God's own testimony concerning it: "And a highway shall be there, and a way, and it shall be called the way of holiness; the unclean shall not pass over it; but it shall be for those: the wayfaring men, though fools, shall not err therein" Isa 35:8.

But the servants of the Lord have not yet done their work, nor fully executed all their commission. They have still other work upon their hands. When they have gone through the gates, prepared the way of the people, and cast up the highway, then they have to "gather out the stones". This indeed is back-breaking work, for the stones which they have to gather out are often very heavy, and deeply imbedded in the mud and mire. This work, therefore, especially requires that they should often go down upon their knees, and toil in the mud like any navvy, that they may gather up the stones which otherwise they would not be able to move.

But what are these stones? Not the stones which they have laid to cast up a highway; for to be ever doing and undoing, pulling their own work to pieces, and making the King's highway a confused heap, like a broken-up London pavement, would be but a poor employment; though too many who call themselves labourers, are doing this all their lives. No; this is not the work which the Lord's servants are here called to do; for they are workmen who need not be ashamed, either of their work or their workmanship, their Master or his commission. But these stones which they have to "gather out" are the stumbling blocks of sin, Satan, and unbelief, thrown upon the King's highway after it is cast up, so that they block up the road, or cause the children of God to stumble in it.

That this is the meaning of the command is evident from similar instructions which the Lord has elsewhere given: "Cast ye up, cast ye up, prepare the way, take up the stumbling block out of the way of my people" Isa 57:14. The servants of God, then, have to gather out these stones which impede the road, and over which God's people might stumble or come to a dead stand, finding the way so blocked up that there is no passage. This is often literally the case in mountain roads, on which however well constructed, rocks and avalanches fall from above, making them impassable until they are moved out of the way. Bearing this in mind, let us cast an eye at some of these stones which block the road of God's people, and which the servants of God have ministerially to gather out.

1. Some of the Lord's people fear that their sins are too great to be pardoned. Here, then, they find a stone upon the King's highway which they cannot remove, nor get round, for it is too deeply imbedded and too heavy for them to lift, and too high for them to climb over, so that they often come to a dead stand, afraid to go back and yet unable to go forward. Then the servant of God has to come and gather out the stone. This he does by showing them that "the blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from all sin"; that there is no iniquity a child of God has ever committed, except the unpardonable sin, which he cannot commit, that is not freely forgiven him for Christ's sake. As, then, he holds up the blood of the cross, it is as though he said to their sins, "What art thou, O great mountain? before Zerubbabel thou shalt become a plain" Zec 4:7. He thus gathers out the stone, takes it out of the path, and casts it, so to speak, into the depths of the

sea, so that when these sins are sought for they shall no more be found Mic 7:19.

2. Another stone is one which many tried souls have stumbled over-a fear lest they have sinned against the Holy Ghost. The servant of God, then, has to gather out this stone also, by showing from the Scriptures who the characters are who have committed the unpardonable sin and what are its marks, thereby plainly proving that a child of God never can be guilty of it; for if he were, instead of being tried and distressed with the fear of it, he would have been given over to a reprobate mind, hardness of heart, or utter despair.

3. Another stone which the labourer, who labours in word and doctrine, has to gather out, is the guilty fear of one who has backslidden from the Lord, either inwardly or outwardly, and who is trembling under the apprehension that this backsliding is a proof there is no grace in his heart. This is a source of many dismal fears, for such a one thinks that had he been a child of God, he could not have backslidden so repeatedly, wandered so far from the Lord, and got into so barren and unfruitful a state. This is a deep and heavy stone against which he stumbles, for he finds that he cannot move it out of the way, or pass over it. Here, then, the servant of God has to come to his aid and point out the cases of Peter, David, and others and show how they had backslidden, and yet were forgiven. He sounds too in his ears the invitations and the promises, "Return, ye backsliding children, and I will heal your backslidings" Jer 3:22 . "I will heal their backsliding: I will love them freely, for mine anger is turned away from him" Ho 14:4. As the Lord blesses the word spoken by his servant to their hearts, poor backsliders feel that the stone which has so long stood in the way is gathered up, and they move comfortably on.

4. Another stone, which the servants of God have to "gather out", or I may rather call them heaps of stones which strew almost every part of the road, are the doubts and fears with which the family of God are, for the most part, so deeply and continually exercised. The servant of God comes and gathers out these stones, by showing from the word of truth, such as the Psalms, Lamentations, the experience of Job, &c., that all God's people are liable to these doubts and fears; that an evil heart of unbelief is ever suggesting them or fostering them; that Satan often produces them by his suggestions or fiery darts; but that none of these chilling apprehensions will eventually prevail; that in the end the Lord, who is "the author", will also be "the finisher of their faith", and that ultimately it will gain the victory over all their unbelief.

Time and opportunity will not allow me to enter further upon this branch of the work of the ministry; I shall, therefore, merely add that the servant of the Lord has, in dealing with the experience of the people of God, to open their temptations, describe their trials, enter into their various and complicated cases, and thus instrumentally gather out the stones which lie in their path, and over which they so cruelly stumble.

And then he has, as the last commission given him, to "lift up a standard for the people". As I have lately preached upon this subject in showing you "the banner" which the Lord gives to those who fear him, I shall not dwell long upon it, as it would be but a repetition of what I have there brought forward from the word of truth. I shall merely, therefore, remark that this standard which the servant of God is to lift up is the standard of the Gospel, the glorious Gospel flag, which he has to hold in his hand and wave on high, that it may be a guide for the people to show them the path in which they are to walk. This standard is lifted up in the very beginning of the way to show where the path begins, and it floats all along the road to the very end of the way to show where the path ends: for Jesus is the way, the whole of the way, and every part of the way; and this as Prophet, Priest, and King. As Prophet, he begins the work and completes it by his own almighty power; as Priest, he lines the whole path with blood; as King, he sways his sceptre over the

whole road, for it is the King's highway throughout, of which he alone is Lord and Sovereign.

As, then, the servant of the Lord lifts up the standard of Gospel truth, holds on high the banner of truth and love, it shows the people of God, for whose benefit it is displayed, that this is the way in which they are to walk; for when they see him going forward with this glorious banner in his hand, they, too, can follow on with some confidence; and as they thus keep step by step in their serried ranks, they are "terrible as an army with banners" So 6:4; for they fear no foe, and can put all their enemies to the rout when they see and feel the glorious flag of salvation waving over their heads. When, too, they wander and stray from the path, as the servant of the Lord lifts up the standard before their eyes, it gives them a rallying point once more to bring their feet upon the King's highway; for there and there alone the royal standard floats, and there and there alone do they feel safe under its ample folds.

Thus you see what the work of a minister is, and what is the commission given him by his heavenly Master. I shall not say, my friends, how I perform it, for I am sure I do it very feebly and imperfectly, although I may describe it from the word of God as I see it written as with a sunbeam in the pages of heavenly truth, and as it is commended to my conscience. But I must confess that I see much more clearly what a minister should do than that I do it. All I can say is, that it is my desire to be found faithful in every part of the ministerial work, though I am forced to confess that in this, as in everything else that is spiritual and heavenly, "to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not. For the good that I would, I do not; but the evil which I would not, that I do" Ro 7:18,19.

But I think I may ask us all, what do we know of these heavenly mysteries-of these gates through which we pass successively into the strong city; of this way which is prepared for the people; of this highway which is thus ministerially cast up; of these stones which are thus instrumentally gathered out; and of this standard lifted up on high? Do you not see that the people of God are described here? that the strong city into which they enter is our militant state upon earth; and that we must all become citizens of this city below before we shall be citizens of the city above? Do you not see that we must pass through the gates in order to see the King by the eye of faith in his palace here, before we have right and privilege to enter the pearly gates of the heavenly Jerusalem, which the glory of God ever lightens, and the Lamb is ever the light thereof?

I desire to lay these solemn things before you in the fear of the Lord, who alone can bless his word and apply it with power to the heart; and in this hope and confidence I leave it in his hands for him to seal it with his own unction and savour upon your consciences.

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