

The Gates

Brynmawr Family Church Sermon
Stuart Wheatman, Sunday 3rd Jan 2010

Intro-

- Gates are an important aspect of our lives as, like doors, they are points of access to places, providing security and protection from some whilst providing access points for others. Abergavenny called the Gateway to Wales, so key position, the Gateway Centre so called because revelation given to Tony about being a Gateway for the things of God. Brynmawr meaning 'big hill' is the highest town in Wales and in a key position, being a gateway to the valleys.

Read Judges 16:1-5

We are in a warfare situation- v2 'they surrounded the place and lay in wait all night for him at the gate of the city'

- Gaza one of the 5 cities of the Philistines who were at war with Israel. Contention over the land- still today.
- One of the images of this last year of military funerals- this is our front line, spiritually speaking- we are at war. Events of this year confirmed it to me again- we are at war. 2 mistakes regarding spiritual warfare- one is to see demons under every bush and become obsessed or fearful, the other is to not be aware of the enemy, and so be unprepared and complacent.
- John Piper, the theologian, has said "The number one reason prayer doesn't work for saints is because we have taken a wartime walkie-talkie and turned it into a domestic intercom. People live differently when they are in the midst of war. Not only are they on the alert, armed and vigilant, but they also spend their money differently because the cause of the front line is everything. ... (Christians) easily display their lack of a wartime mentality. They think about how to get more comfortable and more secure, how to multiply their comforts and ease, justifying it all with 10,000 types of sugarcoated ministries. This war currently raging is worse than what occurred in World War II because the conflict isn't just restricted to any global theater, it's in every town, every city, every home and family, every church. The casualties don't just lose an arm, an eye, a leg, or their own life. They lose their souls. They enter not into any prison camp, but into Hell forever and ever. During this war, God's mission for His people is for them to pray. Unfortunately, people have simply stopped believing that life is war. Instead of using prayer as God intended -- as a powerful force along with "the Sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God" against the powers of darkness in this world ..we try simply to make our lives more comfortable with [prayer]. The bullets of spiritual warfare are flying over our heads, people falling all around us, blood everywhere, Hell filling up with lost people. During it all, we're getting our second houses and our second cars, our nice clothes and our fat retirements, our comfortable, safe neighborhoods, while the world can just perish, thank you." Instead, "this great thing called prayer is a wartime walkie-talkie, designed for war, not for peacetime, and it's designed to do a lot of things in war," Piper said, such as: -- get the accurate location to target the Word of God; give protection; blast open doors so the tanks of the Word of God can go through and defeat the enemy; ask for miracles of healing both for wounded soldiers and for soldiers who don't have any strength left; supply the forces with what they need; and call in reinforcements. Until the Christian life is seen as war, "you will not sustain a life of vigilance in prayer, perseverance in prayer, agonizing in prayer, nor will you build a church that prays anything other than some simple little prayer-meeting type prayer. Acknowledgment of the sovereignty of God is necessary not only because you can't consistently pray for God to save people if you don't believe He has the sovereign right to save people, but also because unless you believe that He's going to win the war, you won't have the energy and the hope to sustain prayer for the triumph."
- Prayer for Gsus live this Wednesday. Brynmawr is a key place for the valleys, it is a gateway for either good or evil. There is contention for this place. As we take ground and encounter hostility from the enemy we have a choice: we can either go under with it, or choose to stand up and fight until the area is secured- Satan will try to lure us away from the battle with the promise of an easier life, but like Joshua said concerning the choice between going God's way or giving in to idolatrous temptations (Josh 24:15) 'as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord'

We have authority in Christ to plunder the enemy's gates

- Samson had an anointing of strength to defeat the enemy (see Judges 13:5)- we have the same! 'You, dear children, are from God and have overcome them, because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world (1John 4:4)'. I am writing to you, fathers, because you know Him who has been from the beginning. I am writing to you, young men, because you have overcome the evil one. I have written to you, children, because you know the Father (1John 2:13). Christ came to destroy the works of the evil one 'The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work' (1John 3:8)- we are to continue the work by plundering Satan's kingdom and bringing the kingdom of God.
- Gates had to be made strong because they were the main places enemies would attack the city. Often there would be a double set of gates with a large area in between and the walls around the gates would be double layered.
- The power of Samson to lift up the gates was incredible- it was by God's Spirit. God promised we would be clothed with power when the Spirit came upon us. Just as it took the power of the Spirit to lift the gates, it took the power of God's Spirit to raise Christ from the dead and that same Spirit is dwelling in us (Rom 8:11)!
- I will build my Church and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it (Matt 16:18)- the gates were the seat of power in a city- it was here that the elders of the city, the judges, councillors met together and administered justice- the Church overcomes the hold of the grave on people's lives through the powerful preaching of the gospel. The gospel is the 'power of God for the salvation of all who believe' (Rom 1:16)- keep preaching it. Paul said '...I am compelled to preach (the gospel). Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel' (1Cor 9:16)
- The battle belongs to the Lord- I shall chase a 1000!
- Jesus is risen indeed! Victory is already won! Satan would try to hoodwink us into believing we are defeated, but Christ is raised from the dead.
- "There fell down many slain, because the war was of God." (1 Chronicles 5:22) Spurgeon on this verse: 'As God's warrior, fighting under the banner of the Lord Jesus, observe this verse with holy joy, for as it was in the days of old so it is now. If the war is of God, the victory is sure'
- "I would rather lose in a cause that I know some day will triumph than to triumph in a cause that I know some day will fail." - Wendell L. Willkie
- Several hundred years before the birth of Jesus, a crucial battle occurred between the Greeks and the Persians upon the plains of Marathon. The battle raged for hours. In many respects it was a fight to the finish. Finally the numerically inferior Greeks, the underdogs, managed a tremendous tactical win, but there was a problem. Soon the Senate, many miles away in Athens, was to vote and would most certainly ratify a treaty of appeasement. In desperation they sent a runner in full battle gear to go the twenty-seven miles to tell of the news. By the time the young boy got to Athens he had run a Marathon. It is said he was totally spent, that he literally ran himself to death. In his exhaustion he was able to utter only one word to the Athenians: "Victory."

Samson neglected to guard his own gates

- Gates are an entry point-they would close at sundown for protection of the city and so travellers would try to get there before evening to avoid being shut out and at the mercy of bandits. There would be watchmen on the gates on towers guarding them and gatekeepers responsible for opening and closing them.
- The gate in Gaza was the most strategic place to capture Samson as it was the entry and exit point of the city. Samson was aware of where the enemy would physically try to attack him and so he was vigilant, but he was not equally vigilant about guarding the gate of his heart by keeping away from the seducing power of the enemy (v1,4&5), and this became his downfall (16:20-21) - are we aware of the routes Satan uses in our lives, the locations and circumstances he tempts us in and are we using prayer, the word of God and action to counter it? 'If your eye causes you to sin gauge it out' (Matt 5:29)- i.e. at all costs avoid the thing that makes you fall.

- 8.6 -- Average number of chocolates office workers ate daily when it was left out on their desks. 5.7 when it was kept in their desk drawer-- 3 when the it was placed roughly 6 feet from their desks. (Source: Health, November 2004, <http://www.health.com>).
- Practical Advice regarding temptation (by unknown) What settings are you in when you fall? Avoid them. What props do you have that support your sin? Eliminate them. What people are you usually with? Avoid them. There are two equally damning lies Satan wants us to believe: 1) Just once won't hurt. 2) Now that you have ruined your life, you are beyond God's use, and might as well enjoy sinning.
- Luther said: "I cannot keep birds from flying over my head, but I can keep them from building their nests under my hat." We cannot keep Satan from plying us with evil suggestions, but we can keep from responding to them. Jesus was tempted by Satan, but said of him, "(he) has no hold on me" (John 14:30). 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 (1Cor 10:13). 'then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from temptation, and to keep the unrighteous under punishment for the day of judgment' (2Pet 2:9)
- Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold (Ephesians 4:26-27)- forgiveness closes a door, as does repentance. Once the door is closed we can command the demonic to flee, but whilst we leave a door open we are giving permission for entry. Close all doors and resist the devil and he will flee from you. 'Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you'- Jam 4:7

Summary

- We are at war, but we also have the victory over the enemy. Let's not become discouraged but press on to take the ground for Jesus. Let's also make sure we close any doors that have given the enemy a foothold in our lives.

Song: *For this purpose*