

God Breaks Down Gates!

A sermon based on Isaiah 45:1-8

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

It was the afternoon of August 5, 2010 when the 121-year-old [San José](#) copper-gold mine in Chile, South America, caved in. Thirty-three men were trapped underneath 2,300 feet of solid rock. Do you remember the whole ordeal?

Seventeen days after the accident, a note written in bold red letters appeared taped to a drill bit when it was pulled to the surface after penetrating an area believed to be accessible to the trapped workers. It read simply, "*Estamos bien en el refugio, los 33.*" In English: "*We are fine in the shelter, the 33 of us.*" But they were in survival mode. They ate two spoonfuls of tuna, a sip of milk, and a morsel of peaches—every other day. They heard the voice that said, "You are locked in with no way out."

The Chilean miners knew; you can be sure they knew. But once the people at the top found out that the men were alive, they spared no effort to rescue them. Soon the skill, knowledge, and efforts from around the world were in Chile: three large international drilling rig teams, [NASA](#), and more than a dozen multi-national corporations. After sixty-nine days trapped underground, all thirty-three men were brought safely to the surface on October 13, 2010, a great day around the world.

We know; you can be sure we know. Sure, we've been stuck in traffic, stuck in winter, stuck in snow. But that's just on the surface. Deep down, we all know what it is like to be stuck in the past; stuck in relationships; stuck in a diseased and dying body; stuck in debt; stuck in a dead-end job...to be in survival mode.

Israel knows; you can be sure they know. Babylon said, "You are locked in with no way out."

In the sixth century BC, God's people were surrounded by bronze gates! Oh, sure, there were ziggurats and canals, and God's people were never far away from detestable statues of the Babylonian god Marduk. It certainly wasn't a prison camp as we'd think of it, by no stretch of the imagination. But they were still in exile. And it was the gates of Babylon and especially the now world-renowned Ishtar Gate that locked them in with no way out.

The gates were the brain-child of Nabopolassar—the founder of the Babylonian empire—and his son Nebuchadnezzar. Ancient Greek historians—write that in late seventh and early sixth century BC, hundreds and hundreds of bronze gates were erected in and around Babylon, making it the world's most fortified city. Israel was locked in with absolutely no way out.

Obviously, they underestimated God. **"I will raise up [Cyrus] in My righteousness . . . He will set My exiles free."** (Isaiah 45:13; cf. 44:28)

It truly is quite the account. In 539 BC, the Persian King Cyrus had to go up against Babylon and her gates. The city began bracing for an all-out battle. Inhabitants stocked their shelves with food and water to prepare for the long siege. The military got armed up, revved up, psyched up, and pumped up.

But when Cyrus surrounded the city, its citizens—rather than fight to the last man and attempt their own version of "Custer's Last Stand"—they opened up the gates. Cyrus walked in and took the city with

ease...barely had to lift a finger. Could you imagine that happening? Almost as mesmerizing as God's takedown of Jericho, tumbling those walls down. But what a low blow to a once proud, mighty, and arrogant empire! What a gut punch to Babylon by God, using Cyrus, his anointed one (as in, the one God set apart for his special purpose and plan)...but what a gut punch to use Cyrus to "subdue nations before him, to strip kings of their armor, to open doors before him (which literally happened!)"...and ultimately, to set his people, to set Israel free.

And as fascinating as that victory was, as joyful as Israel's eventual release from the Babylonian captivity by their savior, King Cyrus, as joyful as that was, it cannot stand up to the release you and I have experienced in our own lives. You know what I'm talking about. God's rescue, greater than we could imagine, more than we ever deserved. I think Psalm 126 does a pretty good job of capturing that thought. Just listen, **"When the LORD brought back the captives to Zion, we were like men who dreamed. Our mouths were filled with laughter, our tongues with songs of joy. Then it was said among the nations, 'The LORD has done great things for them.' The LORD has done great things for us, and we are filled with joy."**

I'm sure you've been there before. Your significant other takes you out to the finest restaurant in town, pulls out all the stops for the date, and by the end of the night, you feel like you've been living a dream. Your boss sits you down in his office, and you can hardly believe your ears as he congratulates you on your new promotion or on a huge raise at work. You stand there in awe, in almost disbelief from the awesome news you just received, news you never thought you would ever hear in a million years. We've all had those times where we've almost had to pinch ourselves because what we're seeing or hearing or experiencing is just too good to be true..."like men who dreamed."

Doesn't God's rescue almost feel like that? I mean, we don't even need to talk about Satan's quiver full of barrage after barrage of temptations to sin. Just think about that one sin. You know what one I'm talking about. Your pet sin, the sin, you commit on a probably close to daily basis. The one, every time we walk through confession in worship, it dominates your thoughts. The one that, no matter how often you repent of it, no matter how determined you are to not give in even just one more time, it's there, dragging you down again and again. It might be worry, anger issues, gossip, lying, lust, dissatisfaction, doubt, depression, low self-esteem. Whatever it is, it's got the upper hand on you, it's got you discouraged, it's got you firmly in Satan's grasp with absolutely no way out...your own captivity. You know, of course you know.

Several years ago, a pastor was teaching in Moscow, Russia, for a couple of weeks. After that, he planned to take a train to St. Petersburg and teach there for a few more weeks. It all looked good . . . on paper. His Russian friends failed to tell him that it was an all-night train. They also failed to tell him this all-night train would be full of Russians who would be up all night. And, for the record, they failed to tell him these late-night-loving Russians would sing and carouse and drink vodka . . . all night!!! But it was too late. He was locked in with absolutely no way out, except jumping off the train!

You know, of course you know. You know what it's like for your spiritual enemy to lock the gate to your future and throw away the key. You know what it feels like to be possessed by your past, hindered by your sickness or discontent or anger. You know what it feels like to be trapped by your short-comings and sins. And you know what it's like to painfully be aware of your lack of perfection and the hell you deserve because of it, the worst future you could ever imagine.

Paul knows, too. Paul knows. **“I see another law at work in the members of my body,”** he says in Romans, **“waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members” (Romans 7:23).** There is so much more I want to say, but **“I am unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin” (v. 14).** **“I find this law at work: When I want to do good, evil is right there with me” (v. 21).** That’s us—locked in habits we cannot beat and bound in a bondage we cannot break.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, God knows; O God, he knows. That’s why he says here, **“I will go before you and...will break down gates of bronze and cut through bars of iron.”** Of course, here, he’s talking literally, encouraging the Israelites by promising that he would break down the walls that locked them in exile. And he did, through his servant Cyrus.

Our walls, our gates of sin, were a little sturdier, but still, they weren’t a match for our God. They just needed someone a little more powerful than King Cyrus to break them down. And God sent that someone, his servant Jesus.

The wall of sin that separates us imperfect sinners from our holy and perfect and sinless God? Jesus didn’t have that. He is God, and even though he became a man like us and experienced temptations to sin like us, he didn’t give in. His perfect life here on earth opened the way to heaven for him.

But the grandest opening was yet to come...through his death. You see, after his betrayal, beating, bruising, his crucifixion, and his cry of victory, **“It is finished”**...paid in full, our sins were gone, laid on him, removed forever, forgiven forever. And his resurrection sealed that victory. Revelation 1:18 makes His victory crystal clear. **“I was dead, and behold I am alive forevermore! And I hold the keys of death and Hades.”** Keys he, in his grace and mercy, uses for you, sinner, to set you free from captivity to sin and Satan. Keys he uses to release you from guilt and shame and the burden of sin and its punishment!

Friends, that’s what Isaiah reminds us of throughout his book. When we are stuck in guilt, God promises, **“Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow” (Isaiah 1:18).** When we feel buried in gloom and doom, He reminds us, **“The people walking in darkness have seen a great light” (9:2).** When we are surrounded by obstacles, **“Every valley shall be raised up, every mountain and hill made low; the rough ground shall become level, the rugged places a plain” (40:4).** When blindness and captivity and bondage stand in the way, God’s Servant comes to **“open eyes that are blind, to free captives from prison, and to release from the dungeon those who sit in darkness” (42:7).** Friends, that’s what he does for you!

And why? For his glory. You see that scattered throughout these verses, **“I will (fill in the blank of what he does for us)...so that you may know that I am the LORD...I am the LORD, and there is no other...men may know there is none besides me...I, the LORD, do all these things...Let salvation spring up, let righteousness grow with it; I, the LORD, have created it.”** It’s all about what the Lord, in his love, has done for you, and it all brings glory to him.

And because of what the Lord has done for you, salvation through Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection, you are not locked in with no way out!

Jesus breaks down gates of guilt and shame, hurt and pain. He breaks down gates that trap and torture and torment us. And the gates of hell will never prevail against the shed blood, the baptismal power, or the mission of the Church of Jesus Christ! GOD’S RESCUE: GREATER THAN WE IMAGINE, MORE THAN WE COULD EVER DESERVE. **“If the Son sets you free, you are free indeed” (John 8:36).** Amen.