

Rev. Dan Welch 3-18-20 Text: Isaiah 45: 1-8 Title: Breaking Down the Gates

“This is what the LORD says to His (anointed), to Cyrus, . . . ‘I will go before you and break down the gates of bronze.’ ” (Isaiah 45:1–2)

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.

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; they most definitely 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.

We know; we most definitely know what it’s like to be trapped. Right now, we are all in a way trapped. Trapped at home, trapped away from school, away from sports, away from the gym, trapped from sitting down to eat at a favorite restaurant, and for what will hopefully be just a short amount of time, after today we are trapped from meeting together in person as God’s people in worship for the rest of the month. It’s ironic: For those of us around during September 11th, 2001 we remember coming together as God’s people to comfort one another. During this current crisis, we aren’t allowed to. Talk about feeling trapped! Stuck! Sure, we’ve been stuck in traffic before, stuck in winter, stuck in snow. But this is totally different than anything we’ve experienced. Ever.

But really even this crisis- which will pass- even this is just on the surface. We will get through this. There’s another type of “stuck” that goes deeper. 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**. There has got to be a way of escape from all of this being “stuck.”

Israel knows; they most definitely know about being stuck. 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. But it was the gates and especially the now world-renowned Ishtar Gate that locked them in with no way out.

As a matter of fact, by the time of the 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. They really were stuck.

But God says: “I will raise up [Cyrus] in My righteousness . . . He will set My exiles free.” (Isaiah 45:13; cf. 44:28)

In other words, Cyrus is God’s gate-breaker! In 539 BC, Cyrus had to go up against Babylon and her gates. The city began bracing for an all-out battle. To prepare for the long siege, the inhabitants stocked their shelves with food and water and toilet paper (😊). 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 a “Custer’s Last Stand”—opened up the gates. Cyrus walked in and took the city with extreme ease.

What Israel was about to learn is that with God’s rescue, it is always greater than we imagine and more than we deserve (cf. Ps. 126:1). That’s what Isaiah says 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 dryness and deadness stand in the way, the Lord turns “the desert into pools of water, and the parched ground into springs” (35:7). 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).

You know; You most definitely know what it is like for the enemy to lock the gate to your future and throw away the key. Not only does it feel like that is what happening to all of our lives right now with the Coronavirus pandemic, but you also know what it’s like to feel possessed by your past, trapped by your transgressions, and suffocated by your sins.

Paul knows, Paul most definitely knows. “I see another law at work in the members of my body, 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). “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. But then along comes God’s ultimate gate-breaker, our Lord Jesus Christ!

Opening day was at His Baptism where one witness writes, “As He was praying, heaven was opened” (Matthew 3:16). Spirit-empowered, this anointed one, the Messiah ministers in Palestine to open eyes and ears and mouths and hearts; He even opens graves.

But the grandest opening was yet to come; after the betrayal, beating, bruising and burning of the sun, 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.”

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. He even breaks down the gates of fear and foreboding that many of us may be experiencing right now. 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 is greater than we imagine and more than we could ever deserve! Dear friends in Christ, during these difficult days especially, remember what Jesus declared to you in John 8:36: “If the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed”! Amen