

Rev. 3:8. the Church's Little Strength, and the Lord's Great Love

by Horatius Bonar

Christ shows tenderness and compassion to the feeble, and offers an open door of service and success, encouraging them to keep His word and not deny His name.

Scripture: Isaiah 32:2, Isaiah 40:11, Isaiah 42:7, Isaiah 43:3, Isaiah 46:1, Isaiah 63:9, Isaiah 66:13, 2 Corinthians 2:12, Colossians 4:3, Revelation 3:8

Topics: "Strength in Weakness", "Christ's Love"

Description

Horatius Bonar emphasizes the tender love and gracious character of Christ as depicted in Revelation 3:8, where He acknowledges the Church's little strength while offering an open door of opportunity and service. Bonar highlights Christ's patience and gentleness, encouraging believers to rely on His compassion during their struggles and weaknesses. He reassures that even in their feebleness, their faithfulness in keeping His word and not denying His name is honored by God. The sermon illustrates how Christ's love is a source of comfort and strength for those who feel overwhelmed and in need of support. Bonar's message is a reminder of the open door to salvation and service that Christ provides, regardless of our limitations.

Transcript

"I know your works--behold, I have set before you an open door, and no man can shut it--for you have a little strength, and have kept my word, and have not denied my name."--Revelation 3:8.

It is Christ's gracious character and tender heart that come out so strikingly in these words. How considerate and patient! How gentle and tender in His words and doings! How affectionate and loving towards those whom He might have blamed and condemned! Here is the love that passes knowledge--and here is what the apostle calls 'the meekness and gentleness of Christ.' He bears true witness of Himself when He says, 'I am meek and lowly of heart.' Who would be afraid to deal with such a Savior, or to betake themselves to Him in any circumstances of sin or grief, or emergency or peril?

Let us hear how the Old Testament prophets spoke of Him and announced His graciousness, as Messiah. He was to be 'a hiding-place from the wind--a covert from the tempest--rivers of water in a dry place--the shadow of a great rock in a weary land' (Isaiah 32:2). He was to 'feed His flock like a shepherd--to gather the lambs with His arm, to carry them in His bosom, to lead gently those that were with young' (Isaiah 40:11). He was not to 'break the bruised reed, nor to quench the smoking flax' (Isaiah 43:3). He was to

'open the blind eyes, to bring out the prisoners from the prison, and those who sit in darkness out of the prison-house--to bring the blind by a way that they knew not' (Isaiah 42:7, 16). He was to 'bind up the broken-hearted, and to proclaim liberty to the captives' (Isaiah 46:1). He was to be 'afflicted in all the affliction of His people, in His love and pity to redeem them, to bear them and carry them' (Isaiah 63:9); He was 'to comfort them as one whom his mother comforts' (Isaiah 66:13).

Let us see how He unfolded this graciousness, this tenderness, in the days of His flesh. We learn this from His own acts and words; from His affability and accessibility everywhere, and to everybody; from His attractiveness and winningness--His perpetual beneficence to all. What tenderness in His tears over Jerusalem; in his dealing with the woman that was a sinner; in His acting to the widow of Nain and her son; in His weeping at the tomb of Lazarus; in His pity for the daughters of Jerusalem; in His loving the young man who came to Him; in His being moved with compassion for the multitudes; in His treatment of children, both infants and those farther grown--laying his hands on them, taking them in His arms, and saying, 'Of such is the kingdom of heaven!' The Gospels are four portraits in different attitudes--but they all bring out the same tender love.

It is this tender love that He shows in heaven as well as on earth. It cheered John in Patmos; and it breathes through these seven epistles, and very beautifully in our text. What considerate kindness, patience, and gracious meekness are embodied in these words! There was something wrong in Philadelphia, but He touches on this very slightly and kindly. We might think there was unfaithfulness in such a way of dealing and speaking, but we know not what manner of spirit we are of. Harshness is not faithfulness--strong words are not convincing--still less melting or winning. Let us see here, two things--

I. Christ's open door. The figure here is probably similar to those expressions in which Paul speaks of 'a door being opened to him of the Lord' (2 Corinthians 2:12); of 'a great and effectual door being opened' (1 Corinthians 16:9); of 'God opening a door of utterance' (Colossians 4:3). In one aspect it is the door of service, and labor, and opportunity; in another, it is the door of success, and blessing, and power. It is the door both of service and success. It is an open door, not requiring even to be knocked at, but thrown wide open, that the Philadelphians might enter in at once, and without obstacle.

Christ, when He comes to men, finds a closed door; so He has to knock; but 'before them' He sets an open door. It is right before them, immediately in front; for this seems the true point of the word. They have not to seek for it; it is not far off nor hidden, but just before them, thus open, by Christ Himself. He who has the key of David has unlocked it and thrown it wide open. Christ with His own hand has opened it, and with His own finger points to it, saying, 'Go in!' Christ has thus two open doors--an open door for salvation, and an open door for service. Go in, He says to every loiterer on the outside; Go in and be saved. See there, just before you is the house of salvation. I have set it before you open, and no one can shut it (either man or devil.) Go in, He says also to each Christian--Go in and work. See, right before you is the door of service. I have set it open, and no man (or rather, 'no one,' whether man or devil) can shut it.

II. The Church's little strength but true faithfulness. In tenderness and grace He now speaks to commend. 'The Lord is very pitiful and of tender mercy.' Three reasons are given for this consideration and love.

(1.) You have little strength. It was this Philadelphian feebleness that excited the compassion. Little strength! How tenderly He speaks! Little strength! Therefore you need an open door. You have no power to fight or struggle. Nothing but an open door will do for such little strength. The little strength and the open door suit each other well. He knows our frame, and remembers that we are dust. He pities our feebleness;

and because we are 'without strength,' He interposes to help. The less of strength, the more of pity and of help. 'To those who have no might He increases strength.'

(2.) Yet have kept my word. In spite of feebleness, she had held fast God's word. This may seem a small thing in the eyes of man; not so of God. He lays great stress upon our keeping His word. His word! How God honors it, and those who keep it, even in utter feebleness! Keep my word, however feeble you are, is Christ's message. Let it not go. His 'word,' His 'truth,' His 'promise,' His 'gospel'--these are to be kept!

(3.) And have not denied my name. This is the least that could be said of any one who had remained faithful at all. It is not, 'You have confessed my name,' but simply, 'You have not denied it.' He accepts the very least. How gracious and pitiful! Do not deny Him! Surely He can ask no less. Love is here condescending to its uttermost. What grace is here! And what encouragement to the feeble and the tried!

Yes! all this is wondrous, in its exhibition of the tenderness of Christ. How these words should cheer us amid conscious darkness and deep-felt poverty--or in times of spiritual declension!

Hard and sore is our daily struggle! He sees it and is not angry; but pities, and loves, and helps. He sees us trying to bear up, yet often sinning--fighting, yet often overcome--endeavoring to master our weariness, yet often overmastered by it--laboring, yet often despairing of success--and, as He sees us thus overwhelmed, He pities us most tenderly, and steps in to help. He opens the door--He keeps it open--He cheers us with words of love--He comforts us in our tribulation and supplies us with heavenly cordials in our day of need.

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