

## Closing the Door Against Christ.

Text: Luke 9:51-56

1) People Can Do That

Suggested Hymns:

2) It Is Not Christ's Desire That This Should Be Done.

500, 129, 307, 364, 304

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is Luke 9:51-56, <sup>51</sup> *Now it came to pass, when the time had come for Him to be received up, that He steadfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem,* <sup>52</sup> *and sent messengers before His face. And as they went, they entered a village of the Samaritans, to prepare for Him.* <sup>53</sup> *But they did not receive Him, because His face was set for the journey to Jerusalem.* <sup>54</sup> *And when His disciples James and John saw this, they said, "Lord, do You want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them, just as Elijah did?"*

<sup>55</sup> *But He turned and rebuked them, and said, "You do not know what manner of spirit you are of.* <sup>56</sup> *"For the Son of Man did not come to destroy men's lives but to save them." And they went to another village. (NKJV)*

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

*"He came to His own, and His own did not received Him."* That is John's sad commentary on the reception given to the world's Redeemer when He came upon this earth.<sup>1</sup> *"No room in the inn,"* that was the rebuff which met Him on the night of His birth.

Although His coming had been foretold by Prophets, prefigured by sacrifices, and patiently awaited by the faithful in Israel for many centuries, the people to whom He came first of all, were not ready to receive Him when the blessed day arrived. Generally they were rather disappointed with Him.

Dreaming of a kingdom of worldly splendour, they were not interested in Jesus' kingdom, which was not of this world. The leaders of the Church, in particular, opposed Jesus and His work. They incited the common people to take

a stand against Him. And, at last, they put Him out of this world, as they hoped, on the accursed tree of the cross.

But Christ still comes to people today. He comes in the Word and Sacrament. He asks to be received into the hearts of people that He might bless them, and that they might live eternally. But is there a better reception given to Christ today compared to the time when He came to the Jews? Are the doors thrown open to Him today? You know that they are not. Few people receive the Saviour for what He wants to be and do! Even now in these perilous times, there is no general turning to the world's only salvation, found in the Prince of Peace.

And yet, it is all-important that people receive their Lord and King aright, and that the doors be open to Him.

Let us consider the topic, *Closing the Door Against Christ*. May the Lord bless our meditation.

### **1. Closing The Door Against Christ People Can Do That**

Jesus was on His way to Jerusalem. It was not His last journey which He was undertaking, but one which would definitely settle His destiny as far as the leaders of the Jews were concerned.

From this time forth Christ would also lose popularity. He sees the completion of His work, and His final coronation. And with grim determination the Saviour proceeds on the prescribed course.

Passing through Samaria and desiring hospitality, Jesus sends messengers ahead — perhaps James and John — to make the necessary arrangements. But the inhabitants of this village refuse to grant Christ the requested courtesy, *because His face was set for the journey to Jerusalem*.

The Samaritans were a mixed people who had no part in the Jewish Church. Samaria was populated by heathen people after the captivity. On the return of the exiles the Samaritans tried to hinder the rebuilding of Jerusalem.

But when the work prospered, they wanted to have a part in it; but when conditions were adverse, they joined Jerusalem's enemies. The Samaritans did not worship at Jerusalem. A Jew would not ask a Samaritan for so much as a drink of water. A Jew crossed the Samaritan's country only when necessary.

There was little love lost between Jews and Samaritans. Therefore the inhabitants of this village, chiefly because of existing prejudice, closed their doors against Christ.

But lest we lose ourselves in passing judgment on these prejudiced Samaritans, it would be well to consider how many people today still close the door to Christ because of their prejudices.

Someone does not like certain members of a church, and that is a sufficient reason for him to stay out of it. Another person does not approve of a certain practice of a church, and so he gives it a wide berth. A third person has heard vaguely of a certain teaching of a church, and he will have nothing to do with it. However, none of these people have taken the trouble to find out what the church really teaches, or what it stands for.

Given that the church is proclaiming the full Gospel of Jesus Christ, are not the objectors mentioned, closing the door against Jesus because of their ill-conceived prejudices?

James and John are incensed by the rebuff given to their Master, and they ask for permission to call down fire from heaven to destroy them. They are true to their surname, Boanerges, which means *“the sons of thunder.”*

They feel they have a parallel for their request in the Prophet Elijah’s practice as recorded in 2 Kings 1. <sup>2</sup> *Now Ahaziah fell through the lattice of his upper room in Samaria, and was injured; so he sent messengers and said to them, “Go, inquire of Baal-Zebub, the god of Ekron, whether I shall recover from this injury.”*

<sup>3</sup> *But the angel of the LORD said to Elijah the Tishbite, “Arise, go up to meet the messengers of the king of Samaria, and say to them, ‘Is it because there is no God in Israel that you are going to inquire of Baal-Zebub, the god of Ekron?’”* <sup>4</sup> *“Now therefore, thus says the Lord: ‘You shall not come down from the bed to which you have gone up, but you shall surely die.’”* So Elijah departed.

The King then sends a captain of fifty with his fifty men to Elijah. <sup>10</sup> *So Elijah answered and said to the captain of fifty, “If I am a man of God, then let fire come down from heaven and consume you and your fifty men.”* And fire

*came down from heaven and consumed him and his fifty.* This also occurred a second time.

This is the incident to which James and John refer to. They were ready to have the door closed forever against these guilty Samaritans. In their mistaken zeal the Sons of Thunder overlooked the fact that Christ's kingdom is not built by burning unbelievers and heretics. Some of these people might still be saved at a future date.

Sadly, the disciple's spirit was one of revenge. They were not yet filled with love for immortal souls. The Church does not resort to physical force. Peter forgot that in the Garden of Gethsemane the night our Lord was betrayed.

Professed Christians forgot it in the Crusades and all the "holy wars." Many people still forget it when they try to legislate people into the kingdom of Christ. Would any Christian today like to see the door closed between Christ and certain people?

In theory certainly not, but what about practice? Do we welcome with open arms people who live on the wrong side of the railroad track? What about those of different race or colour? Are our church doors open to them? Are you ready to give up after you have invited someone once or twice to attend church, and he does not come?

How often hasty judgment is passed on the offender, and he is no longer considered a prospect for Christ's kingdom! Thus church people also help close the door against the Redeemer.

When people close the door to Jesus, they rob themselves or others of the greatest blessings for time and for eternity. Who could estimate the wonderful gifts these Samaritans missed by refusing Jesus lodging that night? For wherever Jesus went, He blessed people, materially and spiritually. He wanted also to give these Samaritans more than He requested of them.

Suppose Jesus had not been present at the wedding at Cana, what embarrassment would have ensued! Suppose Jesus had not been with the disciples in the storm, would their little faith have survived the test? Suppose Jesus had not said to Jairus, whose heart was so very heavy, ***“Do not be afraid; only believe.”***<sup>2</sup> Could he have borne his burden alone?

Suppose Jesus had not come to Bethany when Martha and Mary were mourning their deceased brother, assuring them that He was the Resurrection and the Life and proving it by bringing Lazarus back to life.

See the opposite — when Christ has been shut out. See Jesus weeping over Jerusalem, saying, *O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing!* <sup>38</sup> *“See! Your house is left to you desolate.”*<sup>3</sup>

What would it mean to us if we did not have Christ to turn to in times of need? Think of what it will mean at last, at the bar of judgment, to have closed the door against Jesus. There you must then stand alone, stand with all your sins, having nothing to offer in atonement for them.

You will have to face the cold facts, *“The soul who sins shall die,”*<sup>4</sup> and *“the wages of sin is death.”*<sup>5</sup> You will have to abandon all hope as you hear the sentence, from which no appeal can be taken. *“Depart from Me ... into everlasting fire.”*<sup>6</sup> That is what it means to be without Christ, without a Saviour.

Let no one overlook the warning note in our text, *And they went to another village.* These Samaritans did not want Jesus. Well, they must now do without Him. Christ forces no one to open the door to Him.

Patiently He asks to be admitted into your heart, your life. Refuse to heed His knocking, and He passes by.

When the Gadarenes, perturbed by the loss of their swine, asked Jesus to leave their borders, Jesus departed. To the Seventy He gave the direction, <sup>5</sup> *“And whoever will not receive you, when you go out of that city, shake off the very dust from your feet as a testimony against them.”*<sup>7</sup>

You can refuse to read your Bible, to go to church, to listen to a friend’s kind pleading — you can close your heart against Christ, and all that He means.

## **2. Closing The Door Against Christ**

### **It Is Not Christ’s Desire That This Should Be Done.**

People may close the door to Christ, but it is not His desire that anyone should do this, nor would He close the door to a single sinner.

The Lord sternly rebukes James and John for their ill-conceived zeal, when they wanted to have the inhabitants of this village destroyed. Jesus tells them, ***“You do not know what manner of spirit you are of.”***

They fail to understand the very purpose of Jesus’ work. Theirs is a spirit of revenge, and that can have no place in the life of Christ’s followers. Scripture says in Romans 12:19, ***“Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, “Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,” says the Lord.***

Had the desire of the Sons of Thunder been carried out, the doors would have been forever closed to those Samaritans. Scripture says in Romans 8:9 that ***if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His.***

Rather, we are to ***“have the mind of Christ.”***<sup>8</sup> Consider the spirit of Christ. ***“He was oppressed and He was afflicted, Yet He opened not His mouth; He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, And as a sheep before its shearers is silent, So He opened not His mouth.”***<sup>9</sup> ***“When He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously.”***<sup>10</sup>

Think of the infinite patience Jesus had with His disciples, how slow they were to learn the purpose of His coming. What patience He must still have with us today, with all our weaknesses and faults.

Like our heavenly Father, who displays such long-suffering with a sinning world, so the Son, too, does not want to destroy. He wants all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.

So, too, Christ’s Gospel is the Gospel of peace, proclaiming reconciliation between God and man. The spirit of prejudice and persecution is contrary to the spirit of Christ and Christianity.

Do we Christians always show ***“what manner of spirit we are of”*** in dealing with our fellow men? There are the many petty annoyances of the day which in their accumulation are inclined to make us impatient and fretful. There are the burdens and cares of life with their telling effect on us.

Do we, too, at times wish that we might deal quickly with certain people, who at times act worse than the “heathen?”

Christ had come to save also these Samaritans. He was not influenced by the narrow-minded prejudice prevailing between them and the Jews. He had His fruit in Samaria, too. We recall His meeting with the Woman at Jacob's Well. Although she had a bad reputation, was living in adultery, Jesus dealt with her in an understanding and sympathetic manner, and preached one of His sublime sermons to her.

As a result she left her water-pot, returned to the city, and told her fellow citizens, ***“Come, see a Man who told me all things that I ever did. Could this be the Christ?”***<sup>11</sup> Although the Samaritans of the village in our text rudely rebuffed Jesus, yet Jesus left an everlasting memorial to them in the story of the Good Samaritan.

If our Lord could thus patiently deal with His enemies, must we not always strive for a greater measure of His spirit? Many great children of God have come from very unpromising material. St. Augustine is held in high esteem by the Church, but his mother prayed twenty years for his conversion.

Think of the great Apostle Paul. Once he was the self-righteous, pharisaic Saul, persecutor and killer of Christians! Ruth, a Gentile, received a place in the lineage of the Saviour's ancestors. David, murderer and adulterer, becomes again a child of God, and the world's Redeemer is born in his city.

In unmistakable words Jesus declares His stand in our text, ***the Son of Man did not come to destroy men's lives but to save them.*** Not to destroy people suddenly, but to save them, now and eternally, that was the purpose of His incarnation.

This work would require great sacrifice and infinite patience on His part. The proof of His purpose, to save people's lives, we see again most vividly in the Lenten season. Betrayed, denied, scourged, crowned with thorns, unjustly condemned, nailed to the cross, shedding His holy, precious blood, dying an innocent death — to redeem me, a lost and condemned creature.

Jesus ***did not come to destroy men's lives but to save them.*** Does the Saviour not still demonstrate this truth in the proclamation of His Gospel? It is to be preached to every creature. It proclaims mercy, pardon, and peace. ***“Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.”***<sup>12</sup> <sup>17</sup> ***“For God did not***

*send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.*”<sup>13</sup>

We read in Isaiah 55:1-3, <sup>1</sup> *“Ho! Everyone who thirsts, Come to the waters; And you who have no money, Come, buy and eat. Yes, come, buy wine and milk Without money and without price. <sup>2</sup> Why do you spend money for what is not bread, And your wages for what does not satisfy? Listen carefully to Me, and eat what is good, And let your soul delight itself in abundance. <sup>3</sup> Incline your ear, and come to Me. Hear, and your soul shall live.*

In Revelation 22:17 we read, <sup>17</sup> *And the Spirit and the bride say, “Come!” And let him who hears say, “Come!” And let him who thirsts come. Whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely.*

*The one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out.*<sup>14</sup> Christ does not want to close the door to anyone. It is still with a heavy heart that He turns away from the door that is closed against Him. That people might have life, Jesus still has His Gospel proclaimed in the world.

*“Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me.”*<sup>15</sup> The Saviour stands at the door of your heart and knocks with the sound of His Gospel.

You can keep the door closed against Jesus. But it is not His desire that this should be done. If you have natural or acquired prejudices against Him, drop them.

Hear Jesus — that He loves you, that He laid down His life for you, and that He has prepared heaven for you. Open your heart to Him, and let the Saviour in. Always keep that door open to Him. Then you will experience the truth of His gracious assurance, *For the Son of Man did not come to destroy men’s lives but to save them.* Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> John 1:11

<sup>2</sup> Mark 5:36

<sup>3</sup> Matthew 23:37-38

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- <sup>4</sup> Ezekiel 18:20
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  - <sup>6</sup> Matthew 25:41
  - <sup>7</sup> Luke 9:5
  - <sup>8</sup> 1 Cor. 2:16
  - <sup>9</sup> Isaiah 53:7
  - <sup>10</sup> 1 Peter 2:23
  - <sup>11</sup> John 4:29
  - <sup>12</sup> John 1:29
  - <sup>13</sup> John 3:17
  - <sup>14</sup> John 6:37
  - <sup>15</sup> Revelation 3:20