

REVELATION

Every Knee Shall Bow

Behold, I am coming quickly! Blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book. - Rev. 22:7

Revelation 3:7-13 Shining In Philadelphia

Introduction

- A. The final two church letters, to Philadelphia and Laodicea, represent the two streams of practice that came out of the Protestant reformation: one sweet and one bitter. One arm found a great love for the Word of God and a vibrant personal relationship with Jesus (Philadelphia) while the other turned to intellectualism (Laodicea) and soon grew colder.
- B. The evangelism explosion following the Reformation lasted from 1750 AD to the end of WWI and beyond. In Europe first, eventually spreading to America, the revival was carried by the teaching and preaching of men like Whitefield, Wesley, Spurgeon, Finney, Edwards, Moody and others.
- C. Prophetically, the church at Philadelphia represents that love for God and His word and personal intimacy with Him that anyone who calls on His name is invited to enjoy.

(7) Destination

- A. Philadelphia: located 25 mi SE of Sardis; this city of brotherly love had a Greek culture and worshipped idols, the chief one, Dionysius was the god of wine and revelry. The area was known for its abundant vineyards.
- B. This city, along with Sardis, was destroyed in an earthquake in 17 AD and rebuilt by Tiberius. It remains today as the city of Alasehir and still has a Christian witness in its midst from several churches teaching the Word of God.
- C. This letter has no hint of a rebuke from Jesus but is instead a refreshing letter of praise and promise, encouragement and blessing. Faithful, serving, full and alive the saints here waited for Jesus to return for them. I would covet a letter like this one from Jesus for all of us.

(7) Description of Jesus but with a twist

- A. Up to now Jesus has used a description from John's vision in Chapter 1 of Jesus in all His glory; but not so here. Instead, Jesus reaches back for an OT prophesy which spoke of Him being the Messiah to come whose Promised Coming would bring life to all who heard Him.
- B. Holy: Both a title and a character trait (Isa.57:15, Ps.111:9). It is the holiness of God that demands judgment for sin.
- C. True: Means the real thing or the genuine article, it sets Jesus apart from the false gods men were worshipping. (1Jo.5:20, Jn.17:3). This same word is sometimes translated faithfulness!
- D. He has the key of David: A direct quote found only one other place in scripture (Isa. 22:15-25). The prophecy to Shebna and Eliakim have both a near term fulfillment and a long- term application as Jesus uses it here. Scripture interpreting scripture!
- E. From the illustration (Isa.22:15-25) Jesus declares Himself to be the One who would open doors for these that no man could shut (see verse 8).

(8) Commendation

- A. I know your works and have set before you an open door: So the application from (Isa. 22:22). Jesus as always speaks of knowing our works, but here adds that His knowledge of that led Him to set an open door before this faithful body of believers.
- B. Open door: always speaks of opportunity for outreach and service (Acts 14:27, 2Co. 2:12) and (Col.4:3). Those faithfully serving God in the last days will find no shortages of opportunities to serve (Mt.16:18).
- C. What an awesome promise of fruitfulness without striving as the Holy Spirit prepares the way, opens the doors and sets aside those who in opposition might seek to close them.

- D. Apply this truth to your ministry...How is it going for you? Are there truly open doors or is your head banging against closed ones? Striving or abiding? Open doors direct our steps.
- E. For You have a little strength:
1. They had done the best with what they had. It is the same truth Jesus sought to teach us in (Mt.25:20-21). Our feebleness faithfully applied brings His strength in abundance. The last days church will have little strength outwardly, not going out in a blaze of glory as the “dominion theology” people would have you believe. Instead it will abide in Christ faithfully and His power will be seen in us.
 2. The world around us is simply getting worse (Mt.24:12, Lk.18:8).
 3. A little strength in God’s hands can move mountains. God can make much from little and so He promises the saints here; even as He does you and I (1Co.16:9).

F. Kept My Word:

1. Obedience is the definitive proof of love (Jn.14:21). How often today are churches practicing and preaching that which God has forbidden or denied? In Philadelphia they were teaching the pure Word of God and believing it in their hearts.
2. The veracity of the scriptures stands strong today despite the continual scrutiny and challenges it receives. I have never heard one argument that would challenge my complete trust in His Word.

G. Devoted to the Lord’s name:

1. Like some in Pergamos (Rev.2:13) these had followed Jesus and that which His Name represents: Savior, Messiah and Lord of their lives. Imagine testifying to such an idolatrous society the Gospel of Jesus and the Cross and the resurrection. Paul sought to relate it in Athens to the idolaters on Mars Hill (Acts 17:22-23).

(9-10) Rebuke and/or Exhortation

- A. No rebuke found here whatsoever; but there are two glorious promises made: In (9) they are promised protection from hostile unbelievers and a vindication of their faith in the future while in (10) a deliverance is assured from the wrath of God in the great tribulation.
- B. **(9)** (Php. 2:5-9) As Jesus endured the false accusations and mockery, blaspheming and persecution; so must we. God’s promise is that one day our faith will be proven true in the eyes of our enemies (Ps.23:5-6).
- C. Of the synagogue of Satan: (Eph.6:12) Religious disguises: tools of the enemy (Jn. 8:44). We must persevere in faith: one day every knee shall bow: willingly now or by compulsion then.
- D. **(10)** Kept from the hour of trial: That great tribulation, the 70th week of Daniel when the wrath of God is poured out (Rev.6:16-17) upon an unbelieving world. We will escape (Lk.21:36)!
- E. To test those who dwell upon the earth: Those left behind are lost (Jn.15:19) and their judgment will come unannounced (Lk.21:33-35) and they will fall for the lie (2Th.2:11).

(11-13) Promise and/or Warning

- A. **(11)** Behold I come quickly: Suddenly! (1Th.5:1-2). We do not know the day or hour of the rapture, but we do of the 2nd coming (Dan.7,12) (Rev.11:2-3) and (Rev.12:6).
- B. Hold fast what you have: That continued diligence will deliver you unto the end.
- C. That no one may take your crown: Crown is singular (2:10) and refers to that crown of life for those reaching the finish line victorious in Christ. (2Ti. 4:8).
- D. **(12)** 3 promises to the overcomer
 1. Permanence: From little strength to pillars (Gal. 2:9)
 2. Security: To stay forever!
 3. Identity: Lots of new names and titles that say “I belong to God”!
- E. **(13)** Are we listening???

All right. Let's open our Bibles to Revelation 3:7.

John was in his 90's when he was exiled to an island just off the coast of Ephesus, 30 miles or so out to sea, and the Lord visited him and gave him this book that we call "*The Revelation of Jesus Christ*." It is really the summing up of all that the Bible presents to us. Without it, we certainly don't know how it is supposed to end, we don't know if what God says will come to pass, and yet it has been laid out for us methodically here.

John receives, in chapter 1, a vision of Jesus in His glory, and then he is told, in verse 19, to write what he has seen; then to write about the things which are (as we've told you, the 2nd and 3rd chapters are the Church Age, and that's what he's writing to, that's his first vision, if you will); and then to write the things that would come after the Church Age (and that'll begin in chapter 4, with the rapture of the church and the second vision that John is given, and they're always introduced separate from one another).

So what we have been studying - and tonight we're in the sixth of the seven letters that Jesus writes to the churches, seven being the number of completeness or fullness (we went over that in our introduction or maybe the second week) - is truly all that the Lord would want the church to know. It is first-person delivered. It is the only thing first-person delivered that you have in the Bible to the church. There're a lot of second and third persons, but this is the Lord speaking directly to the church what He wants us to be, what we are facing, what He knows we have to struggle with. It is for that reason we've taken one church a week, and we've not tried to rush through it. They're personal letters because the church is people. At the end of every letter, you will read words that say to the effects of, "Whatever the Spirit is saying, hear what the Spirit is saying to the church." And the word "hear" is singular, but the word "church" is plural. So God speaks to us individually first, speaks to the church as a whole.

All seven of these churches existed in the 1st century. They were all having the same issues, facing the same governmental restrictions, if you will, and yet the Lord uses them to highlight for us the kinds of things that the church has to be

careful of. It is written to congregations because they're addressed to the pastors of the churches, the "*aggelos*," the angels of the churches as you read them. And it is also, I think, supposed to be looked at prophetically, and we'll lay that out for you once more next week before we turn from that altogether. But these seven churches, when taken in the order that we're given, are a pretty good outline of church history from the time that it was born: the book of Ephesus to the time of the Lord's coming for the church (chapter 4:1), when the church is no longer here. So Ephesus was a church that is represented to maybe the 1st century, 100 A.D. or so. It was a church that had been around for 35 years; it was born in the 60's. But, at the same time, it had left its first love. The motivation for loving the Lord had departed from the church, and Jesus talks to them about the fact that He looks at why we do what we do. The Smyrna church, the second church, was a church that faced tremendous persecution from the Romans for about 200 years. The Pergamos church was a church that followed the coming to power of Constantine. He was able to mix every religion together. He made Christianity the state or the world religion for the Romans, if you will. It found very few saints and lots of aberrant theologies and beliefs that the Lord said He hated. The Thyatira church, which came in about the 5th century or so - from a prophetic standpoint was called the Dark Ages/the Middle Ages - ran all the way through to the Reformation. It was known by perverse doctrines and much false teaching. The Sardis church, after the Reformation, had a name that lives. We looked at it last week. It was called the Christian church. But there were a lot of folks who didn't live up to the name, and so they were going through the religious practices, but they weren't walking with the Lord.

Which leaves us with these last two churches - from a prophetic standpoint - both Philadelphia and Laodicea, which appear to be, from all that we can gather from a historical perspective, the two branches of the church that will be in the world at the time of the Lord's coming for the church. They come at the end of chapter 3, obviously. They also speak to the outgrowth, if you will, or the long-term outgrowth of the Reformation. There are plenty of Protestant churches today that are teaching the Bible and loving the Lord, and they are certainly represented by this Philadelphian church. But then there are plenty of churches who deny the authority of the Scriptures, who try to fit into the world intellectually. There's a lot of aberrant teaching these days, where the Bible has been set aside. So we're going to look at Philadelphia tonight, the godly remnant, the shining remnant. We'll leave the last one, obviously - the compromised church - for next week because the Lord puts it at the end, before the rapture of the church.

Historically, there was a tremendous evangelistic explosion that followed the Reformation from about 1750 A.D. through the end of the First World War. And statistically there were so many people coming to know the Lord that it stands out in church history as almost unparalleled. It began in Europe. It was later followed in the United States. Guys like Whitefield and Wesley and Spurgeon and Finney and Edwards and Moody. There were hundreds of thousands of people saved. If you ever want to get a feel for reading about that time, I would suggest to you Warren Wiersbe's book. It's called "*Walking With The Giants.*" It's a really well done overview of church history at that time and what God was doing in various places in the world.

So there is a Philadelphia portion of the church, and then there is a lukewarm portion of the church as well before we get to chapter 4 and John's second vision and the rapture of the church.

But tonight we'll follow the same outline that we've done for the other five churches. And they all follow the same way: there's a destination given; there's a description of Jesus (usually found in chapter 1, except tonight is the exception); there's a commendation given for most; a rebuke for some or exhortation; finally, a warning or a promise.

So, maybe before we start, if you can find Isaiah 22 in your Bibles, we're going to go there in a few minutes to give you some insight into one of the comments that's made in this letter that we wouldn't maybe understand otherwise. So just Isaiah 22, and then we'll be able to jump over there quickly when we get started.

Chapter 3:7, " 'And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write.' " "Angel," like I said, is "*aggelos.*" It means messenger, pastor, overseer. The church at Philadelphia was only 25 miles or so south and then east of where Sardis was. You know its name means "brotherly love." It was built in honor of King Philadelphus of Pergamos. He built this city for his brother, King Eumenes. It was a Greek city early on. Even in Jesus' day, they worshipped a lot of very pagan gods. Their chief god was Dionysius, the god of wine and revelry. Maybe some of you remember worshipping at his altar when you were younger. The place was filled with vineyards; it was a place of tremendous vineyard growth. Along with Sardis, not too far from them, the place was leveled by an earthquake in 17 A.D. It was rebuilt by Tiberius, as was Sardis. It was very resistant, in the 1st century, to Muslim influence, and throughout the Middle Ages, it resisted the Muslim influence

which gripped the land and today still exists. The name of the place today is Alasehir. Alasehir. It means the city of God. There are some really good Christian churches in town that you can find on the internet and even follow if you like. There are also forty-five mosques in town. So it's an interesting place.

In this letter from Jesus to this church, there isn't the slightest hint of a rebuke. If I was going to pick what letter I wanted, I'd want this one written to me from the Lord. It's a refreshing letter of praise and promise and encouragement. It is a church fellowship that was reaching out in faith, was alive in Jesus, had extended themselves to the full, were eagerly waiting for the Lord to come back, served Him with a loving heart. And, like I said, I don't think you could pick a better letter to receive from the Lord.

The description of Jesus up to this point has been from chapter 1. We've pointed out that if you go back to chapter 1 and the vision that John is given of Jesus - starting in verse 12 and going down through verse 16 - the Lord, in His letters, picks a portion of that vision that John saw that lines up with what He wanted to say to the church that He was writing to. But that isn't the case here. Instead, Jesus takes a title for Himself from another part of the Old Testament - where we're going to go here in just a minute - a well-known prophecy which spoke of Him being God.

But He starts first, there in verse 7, with these words, " ' "These things says He who is holy, He who is true." ' " The word "holy," when it applies to God, is both a title and a characteristic that can only be applied to the Lord (Isaiah 57:15, Psalm 111:9) and then applied to us in the Lord. But it is a description of God's character, of His uniqueness. The word "holy" means to be set apart. In other words, there's no one like Him. When the Lord calls you holy, it means that you are dedicated only to Him; you've been bought with a price (1 Corinthians 6:20), so you're separated. I think we've used the example of putting your name on a cup at a picnic, and no one else should be drinking out of it; that's your cup. Well, you're His kid, and you're the one that should be serving Him. So He's holy it says, obviously, everywhere. There is no one like Him. He's without sin. He's unique. He's separate. In this holiness, and because of this holiness, God demands judgment for sin because of His nature. He is holy. So you can say, "Well, Lord, we've all sinned. Just sweep that under the rug, and let's get goin'." Which makes sense until you realize God's holy. He's got to deal with sin in a holy manner. Which is why His Son had to be sent. This is a payment that justifies the holiness and the justice of God.

So this is the one Jesus says, "I'm the One who is unique, and I am the One that is true." In Greek, the word "true" just means genuine or, if you will, the real thing. In opposition to all of the false gods and all of the false ways of men, Jesus is the One that is truly God. Jesus would say, in John 17:3, to the boys, as He's praying there at the Kidron Brook, and He says to them, "This is eternal life, that they might know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent." John would write, in 1 John 5:20, "We know that the Son of God has come and has given us an understanding, that we may know Him who is true; and we are in Him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life." Another way of just saying He's the real deal. He's unique, and He's the One that you can count on. All of God's promises are tied in Him.

Well then we read, here in verse 7, " "He who has the key of David, He who opens and no one shuts, and shuts and no one opens." ' " It is a direct quote from the only other place in the Bible that has this phrase, and that's why I wanted you to turn to Isaiah 22. So if you could just flip over there for a few minutes, kind of hold your place, and look over at verse 15 of Isaiah 22. Because here the LORD tells a story in the prophetic book of Isaiah about two men from history. One man very self-serving; he was well received by the nation of Israel in his place. He laid out a future for himself that he thought would really be a good way to live, and yet the LORD says of him his judgment was certain. There is another man in this story who was God's choice but would not be recognized as such for quite some time. He would eventually be recognized, but the people initially refused him. It is a beautiful picture in prophetic language of the Antichrist coming to fool the nation, God rejecting and dealing with this false prophet, if you will, and then the coming of Jesus who will open doors that no man can shut and close doors that no man can open. In other words, He's not only holy and true, but there's no one like Him. He'll make a decision as to what happens. Both of these men used in this word from the LORD lived in the days of Isaiah and in the days of Hezekiah. You can find these two men's names in 2 Kings 18 as well. But, because we find them in the book of Revelation and Jesus takes a title for Himself, we can place the symbolism, if you will, or the implication, the inference, upon Jesus' oversight and His being able to say to this church in Philadelphia, "You've been faithful. I'm going to set before you an open door. No one's going to be able to stop you, and no one's going to be able to turn you away because I'm the Lord, I'm true, I'm holy, I'm the One that you can follow. You've made the right choice." But the allusion or the illustration... this is the only other place that those words are found in this kind of a format,

about the keys of David and all. And so we kind of have to look back here to get understanding.

Verse 15 says, "Thus says the Lord GOD of hosts:" (Israel) " 'Go, proceed to this steward, to Shebna, who is over the house, and say: "What have you here, and whom have you here, that you have hewn a sepulcher here, as he who hews himself a sepulcher on high, who carves a tomb for himself in a rock? Indeed, the LORD will throw you away violently, O mighty man, and will surely seize you. He will surely turn violently and toss you like a ball into a large country; there you shall die, and there your glorious chariots shall be the shame of your master's house. So I will drive you out of your office, and from your position he will pull you down. Then it shall be in that day, that I will call My servant Eliakim the son of Hilkiah; I will clothe him with your robe and strengthen him with your belt; I will commit your responsibility into his hand. He shall be a father to the inhabitants of Jerusalem and to the house of Judah. The key of the house of David I will lay on his shoulder; so he shall open, and no one shall shut; and he shall shut, and no one shall open. I will fasten him as a peg in a secure place, and he will become a glorious throne to his father's house. They will hang on him all the glory of his father's house, the offspring and the posterity, all vessels of small quantity, from the cups to all the pitchers. In that day," says the LORD of hosts, "the peg that is fastened in the secure place will be removed and be cut down and fall, and the burden that was on it will be cut off; for the LORD has spoken." ' ' " And so we get this very prophetic.....and until you read Revelation and you go read the history in 2 Kings, you might just say, "Oh, that's confusing." And I would agree with you that if you haven't done your homework, it very well could be.

Shebna was a scribe, a leader at the time of his existence. He had great hopes for his fame. He was so sure of his place in Israel's history that before he was very old, he had already carved out a sepulcher for himself, cut out a tombstone into the rocks outside of Jerusalem as a legacy. If you go with us to Israel - and our hope is to go a year from March - in east Jerusalem, on the west slopes of the Mount of Olives, there are still a lot of rocks and tombstones carved out of rock done by some of the prophets of old that really wanted to stand in the Kidron Valley and be recognized as you go up into the Temple area. God says to Shebna, "What do you think you're doing, carving for yourself a place?" And then He says, "You're not even going to die here." The Assyrians would come in and would overthrow the Northern Kingdom, due to their pride, and then Judah would escape. But 100 years later, a little bit more, they would fall to the Babylonians. So this

guy was going to be taken away and die in a foreign country. But he seemed to have such great success among the people - everyone embraced him - but he certainly wasn't successful in the long run.

By comparison, beginning in verse 20, this fellow Eliakim, who was another one of Hezekiah's cabinet members, exemplified God's choice and plans for the future. He was the prime minister under Hezekiah, and he would decide who could see Hezekiah the king and who could not. He was kind of the fellow in the middle. The only person who could overthrow his decisions was the king himself.

So Israel was courted by this first guy, deceived for a while, and then the true Messiah will be unveiled - Jesus - who, according to verse 22, is the same that is speaking to the church of Philadelphia and saying, "I have the authority to open and shut. I'm the Messiah. I have the keys of David. I line up with the promises of the Messiah that was promised to David. That's Me. And so I'm going to open doors for you that no man can shut." To this church, Jesus declares Himself to be God and tells them that they are in good stead, having Him to be the One that will go before them in the ministry in the world that they are seeking to accomplish. God says, "I'm going to bless you, man. I'm going to go in front of you and behind you, and I'll open every door." At the end of the verses, verses 24 and 25, the prophecy ends by saying the peg (Jesus) and His type (Eliakim); Eliakim was man's hope in a physical sense, eventually, but he would obviously die, still a man, and then the One that would follow him would bring eternal life. So we read the words, "In that day," in like manner; this is the one that is portrayed - Jesus - in prophetic, if you will, terms. But the key is back in verse 22. That's the quote that we're taking out of our text tonight. Right? That Jesus gives entrance into the kingdom, that He's the One who provides the resources for the church to do its work. It's a great introduction of Himself by name. It isn't found in chapter 1. It is the only one that breaks that rule. (You can go back to Revelation now if you want.) But it is in that same manner that the keys of heaven, by the way, are handed to the church. You remember some of those verses, probably, right? Where, in Matthew 16:19, Jesus said to His disciples, "I'm giving you the keys to the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven." Jesus said the exact same thing to the disciples on Easter Sunday evening; as He breathed on them, they received the Holy Spirit. And then He said the same things to them, that He would give them the power to retain sins or to forgive them (John 20:23). It means to be able to say to people, "Here's how your sins can be forgiven, and here's how your sins will

never be forgiven." He gave them the gospel to go and preach to others. So, in like manner, Jesus has the keys. He's the fulfillment of the promise to David. He's the One that will lead the church, in the Church Age, to be successful even when there seems to be very little places to go. But when it's applied prophetically to the end times, it'll be the Antichrist that first comes to the nation of Israel and fools them, and, for a little while, they'll embrace him. But he's not the one that God has chosen, and eventually he will be judged. So, lots of prophecy hidden in there as well, but I think it's worth going to look at it. When people say the book of Revelation could be hard, well, here's a phrase that you won't find anywhere else but one place. So you're pretty safe to go to that one place and to find it based on what God has given to you there.

If you compare what the scribes and the Pharisees were told by Jesus in Matthew 23:13, when the Lord goes after these false prophets and these poor teachers, and He says to them, "You hypocrites! You shut up the kingdom of heaven against men; for you neither go in yourselves, nor do you allow those who are entering to go in." So they were working against God's work, if you will. They were working against what God wanted to do.

So we have the key. The key is Jesus.

So let's go back now in verse 8 of chapter 3 in Revelation, here, where we hear, then, Jesus saying, "I know your works. See, I have set before you an open door, and no one can shut it." So, if you're wondering, He applies it to Himself, and then He applies it to their lives. The application is from Him. Jesus begins by saying - I think I've mentioned it six times now, right? - to every church, "I know your works." Here he adds that His awareness of their works leads Him to give them an open door or, if you will, the way that they have lived their lives as God's people in this generation caused them to find God's blessing as they went forward. He'll open the door, and no one will shut it. Nothing can stand in your way. I've always loved that whole concept because I know that, so often, the church laments, "Oh, we're fighting the government, we're fighting rules and regulations, we're fighting people, we're having difficult times with the city." Look, God's bigger than all that stuff, and if He sets before you an open door, you don't sweat it. And if He shuts before you a shut door, what do you want to do except run into it and hurt yourself? Right? He's not going to open it. So I think there're great things to be learned from God's Word in terms of how do we live our lives as God's people in a world that doesn't know the Lord. And the thing is we really can't be overcome.

Right? We can find difficulties, struggles, challenges; but God's not going, "Man, I didn't know it was going to be this hard." He knows exactly what's going on. If He opens the door, no one's going to shut it. So we use the terms "open door," and it's used a lot in the New Testament to talk about God giving us opportunity and outreach or in service. When Paul showed up with Barnabas in Antioch, in Acts 14:27, he said, "I gathered the church together and told them all the things that the Lord was doing with us," and then it says, "and how He opened the door of faith to the Gentiles." It's a great word. "God set before us an open door." You read about it a lot. He writes about his experience in Troas, Paul does, to the Corinthians, and he says, "I came to Troas, and a door was opened for me by the Lord" (2 Corinthians 2:12). He wrote to the Colossians, in chapter 4:3, "Could you pray for us, that God would set before us an open door?" I think that's a good prayer to put on your prayer list. God, set before the church an open door so we're not running into the wall.

In these last days, walking with Jesus should find no shortages of open doors. When Jesus spoke to Peter there and changed his name (up in the northern Galilee area), He said to him, "Your name's going to be called Peter because on this rock" (not on Peter's name because Peter's name means "pebble," but upon this rock, the rock being his declaration of what his belief in Jesus was, who He was) "I will build My church," and He says, "the gates of Hell shall not prevail against it" (Matthew 16:18). So the promises of fruitfulness - where God goes before and opens the door - mean that if we really trust the Lord and walk with Him, there really is no need for us to be striving or struggling, or trying to provide artificial respiration to ministries that aren't going anywhere, or trying to pump people up, or beg for money, or try to strain a cause or, "Come on, join the work! We can do it!" We don't need to do that. If God opens the door and His Spirit is poured out, it ought to be a blessing to the church. And this is a last-days church in many ways. If you're constantly struggling and banging your head against the wall, maybe you're not where you need to be. I expect to see open doors. We don't always get 'em. Sometimes doors just slam in our face. I can't begin to tell you how many times we tried moving to a bigger place, even until a few years ago. We bought a place - 18 acres - for a lot of money. Would have put us in debt for a long time. But it could have given us the opportunity to do whatever we wanted. And we sold this place, and we had investors that were going to buy this place, and we had a year or two given to us free where we could stay while the other place was built. And the day we were going to sign the contracts, they found some problems on the land we were going to buy. And we said, "Well, then we can't do this," and said to the man buying

our place, "Are your investors going to wait?" and he goes, "No!" So we said, "Well, then we can't buy this place," and we gave it all back to them. Four weeks later they cleared it up, and we'd already made a commitment to build here. It was nice to have an open door, but we first ran into a closed one. Headlong. At 100 mph. God does what God does. It's His church. So I think we should be looking for open doors, and when the Lord opens the door, then we should see expansion and churches planted and lives changed and elders raised up and fruit that follows. It should be the Lord's church.

Jesus gives to this church three reasons for His blessings to be poured out upon them, and I just love the verse. Because you read, in verse 8, " 'I know your works. I've set before you an open door. No one's going to shut it.' " And then He says these three things, " 'For you have a little strength, have kept My word, and have not denied My name.' " I couldn't be happier.

"You have a little strength." Whoever these folks were, they weren't a large church with much influence. They didn't have a lot of influential people in their church. I suspect they didn't have a big building; well, they didn't have any building in the 1st century. They didn't have huge numbers. They probably didn't have lots of outreaches. But they had shown God great faithfulness in the little things that God had given them. In other words, they had done as much as they could with what they had been given. Which, by the way, is God's only way, in the Bible, of growth. God looks for faithfulness from us in the little things. If you're faithful in the little, then God will give you much. And the only motive for being faithful in the little is that you love the Lord. There's no glory in it. There's no financial gain in it. You can't promote yourself in it because there's nothin' goin' on. You just have to be faithful in the little. So it sustains you because that's all you have to go with. "I want to do this as unto the Lord." And if you are faithful to serve Him faithfully, then God will give you more. He'll entrust greater things to you. You remember the story of the talents, there in Matthew 25, when Jesus handed out talents. To one, ten. He said, "I've made ten more." To the one He gave five, He said, "Where are the five talents?" He said, "Here, Lord. You've delivered five talents. I've gained five more." And the Lord said, "Well done, good and faithful servant. You've been faithful in a few things. I'll make you ruler over many. Enter into the joy of the Lord." So God just wants us faithful. And you should.....in the church that God gives the greatest applause to and recognition to, and sees the greatest things that please Him, He's able to say to them, "Because of how you're going about your work, nothing shall be kept from you, and because you've only had

a little strength and been faithful, I'm going to open the door so you're going to have a lot of things that you can accomplish." Our feebleness - faithfully applied - will bring His blessings - powerfully given. Our feebleness - faithfully applied - will bring His blessings - powerfully given. I think if you're a ministry overseer, or you're in a home Bible study, or you're starting a work in the mission field, or whatever it might be, and maybe not many people are showing up yet and, "Oh, man, come on, Lord, bless this thing," and it doesn't seem to be going anywhere, I think if you'll be faithful in the little, God will give you much. If you're slothful and expect more, you're probably going to lose even what little thing that you have.

When I first started teaching as a young guy in a home Bible study (in which I got saved), I really took over the study - I think I was 19 years old - and there were 80 people in a house in Bellflower. And the guy that was teaching it was an older gentleman. He was going to move to Oregon to start a Bible college or something, and he said to me, "Why don't you take the study?" I said, "I've only been saved like a year." He goes, "Oh, I know, but you love the Lord. God'll use you." I said, "All right. Of course I'll do it." I was really excited. Three weeks into my tenure, four people showed up for Bible study - out of 70. Three of them belonged to one family and one other guy. So if that family got sick, pretty much it showed in the church numbers. And I remember going to a guy in Long Beach, a friend who was a pastor, and saying to him, "I so want to teach God's Word. I know God will bless His Word. What am I doing wrong?" And he said to me.....he was patient with me, I was a young guy, really driven to.....he said to me, "You know, if you're willing to give all of your time and energy to teach four people, God can use you. But if that's too little for you, God's got nothing for you." And I left and thought, "What a jerk!" (Laughing) That's exactly what I thought driving home, "What an idiot." But he was right. You know, if you're willing to do and to serve one, then God can use you to serve many.

So in this letter, prophetically, we learn from Jesus that the last days church should "have a little strength." We're not going to go out in a blaze of glory. Even these kingdom theology people - if you've read any of their nonsense - should know better. If you listen to the visions of Daniel for the world kingdoms and how they proceeded forward from the days of Nebuchadnezzar, all of the visions for the world kingdoms just get weaker as they go. Jesus was able to say (Luke 18:8), "When I come back, will I find faith upon the earth?" I don't think that the church is going to go out in a blaze of glory. The world around us is getting worse. Jesus said, in Matthew 24:12, "Because lawlessness will abound, the love of many

will grow cold." This is not going to be.....we're not going to rise to the top. We're going to have little strength, but we're going to get a lot done because we're going to let the Lord be the Lord and be the One that we look to. Little strength in your life is enough to do great things in the Lord. Little strength is enough. "Oh, I want great strength!" You just need a little strength. All we need is God's hand upon us. A little strength in God's hand is all we'll ever need, and the saints here in Philadelphia had learned, and Jesus acknowledges their faithfulness. God can make a lot out of nothing. Just look around here.....at what God can do. As long as He gets the glory. When Jesus told Paul about his thorn in the flesh, "My grace is sufficient, My strength is made perfect in your weakness," (2 Corinthians 12:9) it says the same thing. Right? So "I'm going to set before you a door that no one can shut because I know your works, and you've had a little strength." They were outnumbered. The church was not so influential. There are no outstanding leaders of note. The body was moving forward by God's glory. God saw it. He promised more things for them, not less. When Paul wrote to the Corinthians (in 1 Corinthians 16:9), he said, "A great and effective door has opened to me, and there are many adversaries." But he noticed that God would go before him, and I hope that that's what you're praying for, for us as a church in this community. God needs to open doors so that this community can know Jesus. That's why we're here, and certainly that's what we pray for.

Secondly, we read in verse 8, "You have kept My word." If you really want to know what defines your love for the Lord, this is it. It's obedience. My dad used to say to me, "If you loved me, you'd listen to me!" "I love you, Dad, but I'm not gonna listen to you." Jesus said, in John 14:21, "If you have My commandments and you keep them, you're the one who loves Me." I'll just leave it at that. I mean, you can argue with that all night if you want, but if you love the Lord, you're going to get your Bible out and go, "I want to do what God tells me. I want to do it even if I have trouble with it. I want to do it even if sometimes I don't agree with it. I want to do it because the Lord says so." And the greatest definitive proof of your love for the Lord is your obedience. I wonder how many churches have altogether forsaken the regular teaching of the Bible - "You've kept My word" - and replaced it with emotional appeals, with social messages, with trying to be relevant and up to date. I would challenge you to get on the computer and begin to look around and see how many churches have a resource page that allows you to find a Bible study, verse by verse, through the prophets in the Old Testament. Just see how many you can find. If you find twenty, I'll give you a high five. They're just not available. People like to hear "relevant messages that touch our world, and we've

got to talk about"baloney! We just need to know what God says, and we'll do real good in the world if we walk with God. So there're a lot of places that just..... there are Sunday school curricula that we can buy here - that we get offers to buy - that teach evolution as a distinct possibility. Sunday school materials that go into churches. Homosexual pastors who claim acceptance with God. Churches that turn away from God's Word to secular psychology for a peace that they'll never give. There's pressure to abandon the book of Genesis for science. Yeah. We've learned all about science, haven't we? There's a call to turn away from salvation by redemption through anthropology. There's a call to turn away from life in the Spirit to psychology. The Bible itself is constantly the subject of higher criticism. By the way, the Bible is the most scrutinized book in the history of man, and it still stands. People have gone after it for years, and it does just fine, thank you very much. I have no difficulty believing the entire thing. I've never heard one argument or reason, in all my years as a pastor, that would challenge me to question what God has said. Yet I've seen God do it time and time again - He's fulfilled His Word. No cancel culture is going to cancel this Book because God's true and holy and sure. And what does He say to this last days church? He says, "I know your works. I'm giving you an open door. You only had a little strength, but you have kept My word." That's where your strength comes from.

And finally, "You haven't denied My name." If you remember back in Pergamos, in chapter 2:13, there were those in Pergamos who had just stuck with the Lord no matter what. They stuck with His name. And, by the way, not denying His name implies that you believe what His name entails - that He is the Savior, the Messiah, the Lord of lords, the King of kings; that He has come to die and rose again. Imagine trying to live out those vital truths when you're locked in a society that is completely built on idolatry, and you just stick out like a sore thumb. Paul approached, very wisely, in Acts 17:22-24, those folks up on Mars Hill as he stood up in the Areopagus, and he tried to talk to them about the grave of the Unknown God that he knew, the God that he knew. But it's a tough place to excel when the whole world is worshipping a false god.

So Jesus gives them an open door. They've been faithful in their little strength. They've kept God's Word. And they've been faithful to Him, they haven't denied who He is. And so God says, "I'm going to open the doors for you, and I'm going to leave them open, and they're going to be available to you." This is the church we want to be, isn't it? This is the letter I want the Lord to send to us.

There is no rebuke in this letter at all. In fact, in verse 9, He says this to them, " 'Indeed I will make those of the synagogue of Satan, who say they are Jews and are not, but lie - indeed I will make them come and worship before your feet, and to know that I have loved you. Because you have kept My command to persevere, I also will keep you from the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth.' " He, instead of rebuke, gives them two wonderful promises of protection: protection from the hostility of unbelievers (religious ones at that) and an exoneration of their faith in the future, where they will see themselves standing before God and the people who persecuted them having to bow down to the God they were serving and say, "You were right, and we were wrong." A deliverance from the wrath of God to come, the Great Tribulation that was going to come upon the whole earth.

So, verse 9, Jesus talks about the "synagogue of Satan, those who say they are Jews and are not." We've run into them before. But, again, it is the persecution that comes - religious persecution from the enemy. It's the enemy disguised in religious clothing. Jesus said, there in John 8:44, to those who said they believed in the Lord, "You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources, for he is a liar and the father of it." "You belong to him!" But they said, "Oh, Lord, we'll follow You wherever You go." They hardly meant what they said. There was religious persecution. The enemy here, as before, is the religious community attacking the Philadelphian saints. "One day they're going to bow their knees to Me, and they're going to know I loved you, and I'm going to deliver you from the trials that are coming upon the earth." The Great Tribulation. The word "out of," "*ek*." In Greek, it's the word "*ek*" - but it means to be delivered from; not through but from.

So, they kept His Word. God would keep them from judgment. And His wrath would be poured out. There's a verse in Revelation 6 (when we get there) where the people are that are left after the church is taken out - and the church is found in heaven in chapters 4 and 5 - and the difficulty starts in chapter 6:3. But, in any event, in early on describing those that are left behind, we read, there in chapter 6:16, that the people alive began to cry out to the mountains and to the rocks, and they say, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of Him who sits upon the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! For the great day of His wrath has come, and now who is able to stand?" And Jesus says to the church walking with Him, "I'll

get you out of here. I'll deliver you." To the true believers. Not to the religious community but to the true believers. "I will deliver you." In fact Jesus, in Luke 21:36, said to the disciples, "Pray and watch always that you might be counted worthy to escape the things that are going to come to pass, to be able to stand before the Son of Man." Pray that you're walking in a life that brings you out before the judgment of God falls. So, it's going to test those upon the earth, all right, and I think we're going to discover, as we go, that this test for many during the Great Tribulation is going to lead them to Christ. In fact, it is my firm conviction that more people will get saved during the Tribulation than have been saved since the days of Adam. I'll try to prove that to you, but not tonight. But I'll make you think about it, anyway. But I think that that is correct. And that should be the case. Praise the Lord that when God's judgment falls, people go, "Okay, I can't do this anymore." There'll be plenty who won't, but these obviously will.

So, verse 11, "Behold, I am coming quickly! Hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown. He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he shall go out no more. I will write on him the name of My God and the name of the city of My God, the New Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God. And I will write on him My new name.' "

"Behold, I come quickly." The word is "*tachy*." It means suddenly or unexpectedly. When He comes, He comes in a moment's time. Obviously, the rapture will be such that if you're not watching, it'll overtake you. But we should not have that happen to us. We should be watching.

"Hold fast that which you have." It's a present tense imperative. It means it's a command, and it needs to be applied every moment of the day. So, every day, don't let go of the Lord. You've gotten this far with your dedication and your loyalty and your commitment. It has sustained you. Continue in that because you really don't know when the Lord is coming. So hang in there, man. Day or night you've got to be ready.

So "that no one may take your crown." The word "crown" here is singular, and I suspect that it refers to the crown of life. It is symbolic of the victory that Jesus will bring to you. The Greek word for crown is the word for Stephen, "*stephanos*." It describes a laurel wreath that was given to the winner of the Olympic Games. Not a gold medal. You got a wreath on your head. That's exactly

what you were given. But it denoted that you won the battle, you came out on top. Deny the Lord, walk away from the Lord.....look, nobody has any assurance of where you stand. I am convinced biblically that you cannot lose your salvation, that the work Jesus began in you, He'll complete it in the day of Jesus Christ (Philippians 1:6), that He'll present you faultless before His throne with great glory (Jude 24), that no one can snatch me out of His hand (John 10:28-29). If I can't save myself, I certainly can't keep myself. So I trust that the Lord is going to do that. But the words here are a warning to those who may very well not be walking with God at all, but they're in the church. They're church folks. And like every letter, there're promises to the overcomers. He who overcomes, verse 12, and then there're promises to those who are just sitting amongst the believers, if you will, and they're in a dangerous place. So when you walk with the Lord, that gives you great assurance. Right? When you walk with the Lord, then we look at your life and go, "He walked with the Lord all of his life." We have great assurance.

Verse 12, He promises - Jesus does - to the church the same things that you find in these other letters: permanence and security and identity. Notice, in verse 12, permanence. You're going to be "a pillar in the temple." Now that's got to be a figurative statement, yet it's pretty cool to have "a little strength" now and have a permanence of strength in the house of God to be like "a pillar," isn't it? So we'll have a permanent part in the dwelling place of the Lord. Secondly, we'll have security. Notice the words, "You will go out no more." I love that. When you get to heaven, that's going to be it. No coming back for another life. No trying to do it over. From Genesis 1 to Revelation 22, God says, "You're home at last." And thirdly, you'll have an identity. Now notice there're three names given here: the name of the Father, the name of the new city (not Philadelphia but the New Jerusalem), and then the new name of the Son. Revelation 22:4 says, "They shall see His face, and His name shall be on their foreheads." So there're going to be a lot of names on us - new names, nicknames. We're going to be.....I think the whole thing is you're going to be branded. Right? You're going to be clearly marked as belonging to God. You're going to be more clearly marked than a sales item on a sales rack. You're going to belong to Him. He owns you. There'll be no doubt. That's okay, isn't it? Put that tattoo on me, Lord!

" 'He who has an ear,' " (singular) " 'let him hear' " (singular) " 'what the Spirit says to the churches' " (plural), as a whole. So, faithful church. Little strength. Good work. Keeping His Word. Not denying His name. And one day glory waits for you. Hey, look, it's hard right now to be a Christian. It's going to be great on that day

to be a Christian, though, when every knee shall bow and every tongue confess, and the Lord says, "These are the ones I love, who've walked with Me." I can't wait.

Next week, not so easy. The lukewarm church. When you have to read verses that say, "I wish that you were hot or cold, but because you're lukewarm, I'm going to vomit you out of my mouth," that's far different than what we read tonight. But hopefully we'll capture the heart of God there as well. So next week we will finish the last church, and then we'll get to the rapture and for two chapters we're going to go to heaven and hang around Jesus. We're going to learn songs so that none of you will show up not knowing them. If you show up not knowin' 'em, you went to Raul Ries' church. You tell him that. (Laughing) Don't you mention Morningstar at all. I'll remind you of that next week or two.

Submitted by Maureen Dickson
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