

The Church in Philadelphia
Revelation 3:7-13, Philippians 2:10-11

Slide 1

I want to begin with a two question quiz! First, “*How many exit doors are in the sanctuary?*” Question #2, “*How many doors are in this entire building?*”

Okay, the answer to question #1 is 3. The answer to question #2 is, “*I have no clue.*” Regardless, we have a lot of doors! Why am I asking about doors?

Well, part of this message today and next week will focus on doors. God opening, closing, and knocking on doors.

So, let’s start looking at the sixth of seven churches the apostle John wrote letters to in Revelation 3.

Slide 2

Today we’re looking at the church in Philadelphia which is located southeast of Sardis. Most people know it’s nickname as the “City of Brotherly Love.” Why?

Well, Philadelphia is made up of 2 Greek words – *philos* which means “love of a friend” and *adelphos* which means “brother.” Combined you get “brotherly love,” so Philadelphia is the “*City of Brotherly Love.*”

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Philadelphia was a young city; founded about 150 years before Jesus. The city was famous for its wines and hot springs.

The original intent for building this city was to spread the Greek culture, language and manner of life to the east. So, in a sense it was a missionary city.

This is why the city was also known as the “*Gateway to the East.*” Unfortunately, Philadelphia was located near a fault line, and earthquakes were a constant threat.

Out of the seven letters, only the letters to the church in Smyrna and this one contained no points of condemnation. So, let’s see what we can learn from this church.

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Beginning in verse 7 of Revelation 3, Jesus said, “*To the angel of the church in Philadelphia write: These are the words of him who is holy and true, who holds the key of David. What he opens no one can shut, and what he shuts no one can open.*”

What a great image of Jesus. John gives a quick description which could easily be the source of a number of messages, Jesus is “*holy and true!*”

When John says that Jesus is holy, this literally means He is “set apart,” He’s different.

He’s different because He was the only One who was sinless and pure, the One who could forgive us of our sinfulness. He was and is the Son of God!

Not only is He holy, Jesus is true! He is the true Son of God. He’s real. He’s genuine. Jesus is Who He says He is, He is Lord.

John 15:1, “*I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener.*”

John 17:3, “*Now this is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.*”

When Jesus proclaimed in John 14:6, “*I am the way and the truth and the life,*” we believe Him. We believe and trust Jesus is Holy and true.

With that in mind, Jesus then said He is the one “*who holds the key of David.*” “The key of David” is the regal right or authority of David.

David could shut or open the kingdom of Israel to whom he pleased. He was not bound to leave the kingdom to a specific relative, not even to his eldest son. He could choose whom he pleased to succeed him.

Like David, the kingdom of the Gospel, and the kingdom of heaven, are at the disposal of Christ.

He can shut it against whom He will and He can open to whom He pleases. He’s the guardian of the door. He’s the Good Shepherd spoke of in John 10.

He guards and protects His sheep and lets them in while keeping the enemy out. He’s the doorkeeper.

Jesus is going to open it and keep it open when He needs to; and He will shut it and keep it shut when He needs to.

In life, so many times we make comments like, “*I’m praying God opens a door for me,*” or “*If God closes a door, He’ll open another one.*”

It’s been my experience that sometimes the door is obvious, and we just walk right through. Sometimes we run towards it, sometimes we run away from it, and sometimes we need a little shove.

Now, let me be very clear here, if the request is something which is against God’s Word, then you know that door was NOT opened by God. So, we must use wisdom before we walk through any open door.

Sometimes we’re aided by family and friends, who give us wisdom to guide us toward God’s plan.

Or help with the answer could come from reading the Bible, during worship service, or hymns sung during church, if we're willing to listen and be patient.

Now, the same is true about closed doors. We can easily use the closed door as an excuse about not making an effort.

We say, *"Well, the door's closed so I'll just give up."* Maybe God wanted to see how committed you were. There's lots of Biblical examples of God testing persistence and perseverance.

Even when there's an open door, we still need to summon up the courage and faith to go through the door to see what's on the other side. We must remember and trust that God will never abandon us.

Jesus has all authority to open doors for His people. It's His job to open the doors, and here's some really good news for you: Jesus is good at it, and even better, He doesn't need our help!

Our job is to go through the doors He opens, one step at a time, one foot in front of the other, going wherever He leads.

Jesus is sovereign over the doors of life, because He has the plan, we don't, so, as hard as it may be, we're called to trust Him. Jesus recognized this situation in the Philadelphian church.

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Revelation 3:8, "I know your deeds. See, I have placed before you an open door that no one can shut. I know that you have little strength, yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name."

What a great statement by Jesus for the church. Nothing is hidden before the eyes of Jesus, nothing!

That's scary when we're not doing good things in life. He knows what's going on, nothing, absolutely nothing surprises Him.

Whatever situation you might be going through, as surprising as it is to you, it's not a surprise to Jesus.

All the good, bad, and seemingly mundane moments of life are not a surprise to Him. That gives me confidence in His plan. Even when I don't necessarily like it.

Referring to an open door, He's comforting and encouraging the church. This encouragement was kind of like giving the people a little push towards the door.

You see, they're a small church, they don't have much influence or power in Philadelphia.

They don't have people in powerful political positions. They don't have a large base of money. Their building might not have been the best.

So, the odds are stacked against them, but Jesus encourages them, *"Hey, I've got your back! I've got the door, and when I hold the door open for you, nobody, absolutely nobody can make me close the door before it's time. And nobody is going to get in who is not supposed to get in."*

Isn't that great? We need to hold onto this when we feel we're being persecuted, when people are against us. We need to believe and trust Jesus has our back.

He'll hold the door open for us. We just need to believe that and then walk right through the door.

Philadelphia was small, but they had great faith. We may not have the influence, the power, the money, or the speaking ability like others, but we can trust the Lord as well as anyone else.

Faith is not on a sliding scale according to what you have. It's not based on income, savings, size of your home, your cars, tech gadgets, or your good looks.

We all have equal standing before the Lord, based on our faith, and God honors and rewards faith!

But how much faith does He require? Not much. Just a tiny amount, a simple faith. Faith the size of a mustard seed.

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Also notice the two positive things Jesus said about this church in verse 8:

- *“You kept my word.”*
- *“You have not denied my name.”*

When Paul and Silas came to Thessalonica in Acts 17, their opponents tried to have them arrested. Why? Look at why Paul and Silas were in trouble:

Acts 17:6b, *“These men who have caused trouble all over the world have now come here.”*

Another version says, *“These who have turned the world upside down.”* How's that for an insult?

Paul and Silas had *“turned the world upside down.”* Would anyone ever say that about us? They kept the Word and proclaimed His Name!

This was meant as an accusation, but it was really a compliment. What a great thing to have said about you, that you managed to turn the world upside down for Jesus.

You were an agent of change for Christ. Can you think of a greater compliment?

We live in the day of instant gratification, where waiting and pain aren't supposed to be part of our lives. While in many respects life should be simple, but that doesn't mean it'll be easy.

Most people want the easy life, a life which is comfortable, where life just sails along.

We want that in church, at work, at school, in fact wherever we are and wherever we go. Yet, the people in the church of Philadelphia never denied the name of God.

They didn't go for the easy life. They believed they were called to make a difference in the world, and whatever risk they had to endure, that's what they were going to do, even if it meant death.

They held onto God's Word, which is what led them to proclaim, not deny, the name of God.

How many people at your workplace or in school know you're a follower of Christ?

Do they know that because you tell them, or because you've shown them? Have they experienced Christ living in you?

It's one thing to say, "*I go to church,*" it's a totally different thing to live a Christian life, with all the risks involved, i.e. "What others will say?" or "*How they'll react?*" Are we turning the world upside down?

Slide 7

Of course there were problems in the church, but they weren't caused by the true followers of Christ.

Revelation 3:9, "I will make those who are of the synagogue of Satan, who claim to be Jews though they are not, but are liars—I will make them come and fall down at your feet and acknowledge that I have loved you."

Jesus called out those false Jews who were persecuting the church. He knew they were Satan's minions.

These were the people for whom Jesus initially came but they rejected Him, and now they're making life difficult for His followers.

The good news is that someday they'll come to see Jesus for Who He really is, and they'll bow down at His feet and admit Jesus is the Messiah.

Philippians 2:10-11, "That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

Everyone will bow down and acknowledge Jesus is Lord! What a day that will be!!

Jesus continues with more good news. Revelation 3:10, *"Since you have kept my command to endure patiently, I will also keep you from the hour of trial that is going to come on the whole world to test the inhabitants of the earth."*

The command from Jesus is to be patient as they endure the storm. It's not easy to be patient during the storms of life. We want immediate solutions to our troubles.

We want everything to return to normal. We want the problems, the storms, to disappear. Yet, sometimes, all we can do is wait it out, as patiently as possible.

And even though that's difficult, we must wait with patient endurance, knowing that somehow, if we don't try to barge through the door Jesus has already closed, we'll be okay. We'll find the open door He has opened.

So, when Jesus returns to establish His kingdom on earth, those will be terrible days.

There will be tremendous suffering, but Jesus encourages the church by telling them He'll guard them, so they won't have to face and endure that trial.

They've proven themselves by their faithful endurance.

Slide 8

Then Jesus tells the church some more good news. Revelation 3:11, *"I am coming soon. Hold on to what you have, so that no one will take your crown."*

The early church was fully convinced Jesus was coming back at any moment. This was part of what made their preaching and teaching so passionate.

It was a matter of life and death, so they had to be quick and proclaim the message of Christ to the world.

If they didn't, they were taking the risk that someone would spend eternity without Christ and that was unacceptable.

Can you imagine if we lived with that thought in our heart and mind? We'd be out every day looking to help people come to know Jesus.

Instead of petty squabbles, we'd help others see and experience Jesus. Because of their faith and endurance, they have the crown of life, which only comes through Christ.

When we hold onto Christ, and don't waver in faith to Him, we'll never lose what we've gained, the only hope of the world, Jesus.

The final promise from Jesus is declared in Revelation 3:12a, *"The one who is victorious I will make a pillar in the temple of my God. Never again will they leave it."*

Jesus is giving the church an image of victory like you would receive in going to court.

When you go to court and win your case, you're the victor. You've overcome, you've conquered and gained victory. That's what Jesus is offering.

We're called to be victorious every single day because we have a lot to overcome:

- Temptations all around us.
- Frustrations on all sides.
- Disagreeable/angry people.
- Disappointments and difficult situations.
- Unexpected setbacks.
- Angry and bitter critics.
- Internal discouragement.
- Chronic pain, sickness, and death.
- Friends who aren't friends.
- Personal failures which haunt us.

There will always be a reason to give up and quit. There will always be plenty of excuses if we want them.

But to those who persevere, who'll not give up, even when they feel like it; even when everything in them says, *“Walk away from this mess.”*

To those brave souls who keep on keeping on, Christ makes two incredible promises:

- They will be pillars in God's temple, AND
- They will never leave God's presence.

These words meant a great deal. Because of the constant tremors and earthquakes, the citizens were used to evacuating the city.

Pillars were synonymous with strength and permanence, so the people would have understood the picture Jesus was drawing for them. Those who trust in Jesus will be safe and secure forever.

Jesus was saying, *“They may not like you in Philadelphia, but you've got a home with me in heaven. I'll make you a pillar in my temple so that you will be close to me forever, because I reside in my temple.”*

Slide 9

Conclusion

Then Jesus adds, in the last part of verse 12, *“I will write on them the name of my God and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which is coming down out of heaven from my God; and I will also write on them my new name.”*

The power to name is the power of ownership. Those whom God has redeemed will be named and claimed by Him.

All the old titles won't matter anymore: Teacher, Farmer, Accountant, Politician, Retiree, Influencer, Coach, Banker, Homemaker, Athlete, Actor, Executive.

Other names also won't matter either: Gossip, Unforgiver, Felon, Failure, Hated, Abandoned, Liar, Humiliated, Unappreciated, Adulterer, Lonely, Sickly, Outcast.

In that great day, the blood of Jesus will wash away all the "tags" by which we know each other. Our names won't matter, because we'll all stand on the same ground: redeemed, renewed, and renamed.

We'll be given the name of the new Jerusalem because that's where we'll spend eternity.

When we go to the airport we need to pass through security. They check our tickets, our ID's, passports, and sometimes us.

But all believers in Jesus will have a passport stamped "Citizen of Heaven" and a visa guaranteeing them permanent entrance.

No one can stop us, no one can hinder us, no one can say, "*You have no right to be here.*" We enter by the blood of Jesus, and in His name we'll find our place in the heavenly city.

We have no security down here. We lock our doors because thieves may enter, the stock market may collapse tomorrow, gas prices will go up, there may be a terrorist attack, and on and on.

But if you want real security, eternal security, you can only find it in Jesus Christ. One day we'll have a new name and live in a city that cannot be shaken or taken.

We long to be there, and as Jesus said in verse 13, "*Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches.*" Are you listening?