

Lessons from the Lamps: An Open Door

Revelation 3:7-13

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~Jesus' open door of salvation is for us and for us to give away~

Today we have arrived at the second last of seven letters that Jesus spoke to the seven churches in Revelation. And today is a special letter. Jesus was excited about this letter – He was excited to speak it – because unlike every other church of the seven, with the exception of Smyrna which got a similar commendation, Philadelphia was a good and faithful church.

In Ephesus Jesus said “you have lost your first love.” In Pergamum and Thyatira Jesus chastised churches that had compromised with the world. In Sardis the church was dead in spite of still being open for business. But Jesus was proud of the church in Philadelphia.

So please open your Bibles to Revelation chapter 3 starting in verse 7. You will find this on page 868 if you are using a pew Bible. And as you turn there would you pray with me?

[Pray]

As we have done with the other churches we are going to start with a bit of relevant context about the city of Philadelphia as it pertains to Jesus' words here.

First, Philadelphia was founded by King Eumenes 189 years before Christ. And Eumenes had a brother named Attalus and they had a great relationship. Now in that time this was rare. Usually kings felt threatened by their brothers and so were constantly killing them off, but Eumenes and Attalus were different. They were great friends and this was so unique that Eumenes was given the nickname King “Philadelphus” which means “one who loves his brother.” And when Philadelphia was built it was given this name in his honour.¹

Now Philadelphia was a great city. It had fertile soil so its crops flourished. But it had one major draw back – it was prone to earthquakes.

One of the worst quakes recorded happened in 17AD when the whole area, which included several cities, was destroyed. But while the other cities rebuilt relatively quickly, Philadelphia had the misfortune of experiencing multiple aftershocks that continued to cause devastation.

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¹ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ala%C5%9Fehir>

Imagine living in a first century city where earthquakes were common. There was no earthquake building code or seismic retrofitting that could be installed, so every time even a minor quake occurred there were often casualties and parts of the city that needed to be rebuilt.

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So expensive grew the rebuilding costs that Tiberius Caesar actually sent aid enabling them to rebuild at one point. And this benevolent action led to the city being temporarily renamed Neocaesarea (New Caesar) in his honour – eventually it was renamed Philadelphia – so there was a lot of name changing going on.

But even after rebuilding, the people were so nervous that history tells us many of them would actually leave the city to sleep every night. So Philadelphia was a place where people were constantly coming in and fleeing out and attempting to rebuild.²

There is one other aspect to the city that is important to note before we get started and that is that like many of the other cities we have looked at, Philadelphia was a center for religious worship in Rome. In fact while Athens was the biggest religious center with by far the most temples, Philadelphia was known as the “Little Athens” because of how many temples it was home to.³

But one of the things that was a bit unique about the temples in Philadelphia was the way they honoured people who did a lot of work or gave a lot of money towards the constant rebuilding of the temples after the quakes.

Similar to what we do with park benches, one of the highest honours in Philadelphia was having your name inscribed on one of the pillars in the temples. And then when people would be worshipping in the temple they would notice your name and honour you before the god.

Alright, now look at verse 12 in our text today because Jesus alludes to each of these ideas in order to connect with this church.

[Read Revelation 3:12]

So first Jesus says those who are victorious will be made into “a pillar in the temple of My God.”

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The Philadelphians had been contributing to the Kingdom of Heaven and so now Jesus was honouring them by displaying their names in God’s temple. And the temple Jesus is talking about is the one in the New Jerusalem that comes down out of heaven – so this is a heavenly temple that currently exists.

² Darrell Johnson “Discipleship on the Edge” (Vancouver: Regent Press), 2004. pg 107.

³ William Barclay “Letters to the Seven Churches” (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press), 2001. pg 97

And the amazing thing about this is who is currently in that temple? God. And so when God walks around His heavenly temple He sees the names of those Jesus has made pillars and views them with respect and pleasure – wow!

And it goes on. Jesus says “The one who is victorious I will make a pillar in the temple of My God. *Never again will they leave it.*” Jesus says He is going to fix the fear problem in Philadelphia. He is going to deal with the foundation issue. Philadelphia won’t be constantly going out and coming in any more – they will dwell in God’s temple forever.

And finally Jesus says He is going to change Philadelphia’s name again. Instead of being a tribute to King Eumenes or even Tiberius Caesar Jesus says: I will write on them the name of My God, and the name of the city of My God, the new Jerusalem... and I will also write on them My new name.” So Philadelphia was the Jesus church.

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This was a special church. This was a church that Jesus loved to attend, and to have His name associated with. And unlike five of the other churches, He really had nothing negative to say against it.

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Now that doesn’t mean this was a perfect church. There is no such thing as a perfect church. But this side of heaven perfection isn’t Jesus’ goal – what He is shooting for is Christ likeness in His followers. And Philadelphia had this and so Jesus wasn’t interested in digging some small problem they were having out of the rubble and rubbing their faces in it. He wanted them to know they were doing well.

So what word does Jesus have for this church that was doing so well? What command does He leave them with? He gives them a two sided gift. And here we get to our big idea today: **Jesus’ open door of salvation is for us and for us to give away.**

Look back with me now to verse 7 and the beginning of the letter.

[Read Revelation 3:7-8]

Now there is only one word of command in this passage, and it comes in the beginning of verse 8 where Jesus says, “See, I have placed before you an open door” or some translations read “Look” or “Behold.”

Now it’s important to note that this is a command because it doesn’t really sound like one. We might be tempted to view it more like tourism lingo “hey look over there at that open door.”

But that's not what Jesus is saying. This is a command, and it is connected to the central idea of this passage – we aren't just supposed to notice **Jesus' open door**, we are supposed to enter through it.

Now the "open door" is an idea that we talk a fair bit about in Christian circles. When people look for a new job they say "I'm just praying for God to open the right door for me." Or when making business deals we pray "God, if this isn't supposed to happen then let it fall through – close the door." Or when we take a particular course of action and things go badly, like we lose our job or we run into some other trouble, we often say "I made a mistake, I thought God had opened this door but I was obviously mistaken."

Now I have said or thought things like these myself, but the reality is none of these ideas can be backed up biblically. There is no passage of scripture that talks about God leading us through the different daily activities we face by opening or closing opportunities.

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Now let me be clear, certainly opportunities do open and close, but it isn't biblical to say that God *leads* us by opening or closing doors for us. This isn't a biblical idea.

Instead we find that biblically God leads us through wisdom and conviction which come from the Holy Spirit – if you are a Christian this is how God leads – and then our job as Jesus followers is to pursue that leading regardless of what doors might obstruct us.

The best example of this in Scripture comes out of Acts where Paul is coming to the end of his third missionary journey and he discerns that he needs to touch base in Jerusalem before going on to Rome. And so in Acts 19 we read:

In this way the word of the Lord spread widely and grew in power. After all this had happened, Paul decided to go to Jerusalem... "After I have been there," he said, "I must visit Rome also." (Acts 19:20-21)

This is the combination of wisdom and conviction that Paul is obliged to obey. Later he says:

"And now, compelled by the Spirit, I am going to Jerusalem" (Acts 20:22)

So Paul has a deep conviction about this – he feels God's leading. But hear this, Paul hasn't looked for an open door of opportunity. He's not going to Jerusalem because he found some cheap flights on Travelocity.com. No, he has prayed, he has considered, and he feels that this is what he must do. And then something interesting happens. People start to prophesy that things are going to go badly for him in Jerusalem. We read:

A prophet named Agabus came down from Judea. Coming over to us, he took Paul's belt, tied his own hands and feet with it and said, "The Holy Spirit says, 'In this way the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem will bind the owner of this belt and will hand him over to the Gentiles.'"

When we heard this, we and the people there pleaded with Paul not to go up to Jerusalem. Then Paul answered, "Why are you weeping and breaking my heart? I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus." When he would not be dissuaded, we gave up and said, "The Lord's will be done." (Acts 21:10-14)

So Paul had already discerned the Lord's will, and he was compelled that the Spirit was leading him, and he wouldn't be dissuaded even by less than favorable prophecy. Now notice that Agabus didn't tell Paul not to go to Jerusalem, he only said hardship was awaiting him there. It was the other people who heard this prophecy, got scared, and urged Paul not to go. And that isn't the same thing.

So in our daily lives God leads not by open doors, not by opportunities, but by His Spirit.

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So, if you are wondering what to do about a decision in your life don't just jump through a door because it is open. In reality there are all sorts of open doors, some of which are wise and others which are not.

Instead pray for the Spirit's leading and then proceed to make the wisest decision you are able to make. Now there are tools for making wise decisions that honour God and they aren't actually that complicated. So if you have a big decision facing you and are interested in making a wise and biblically based decision you can pick up a print-out on your way out titled "Discerning the Will of God." I'll also make this available on our website under this sermon. And if you've got any questions about it come and talk to me.

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But as this relates to our text today, realize that the open door that Jesus points us toward in verse 8 isn't a door of leading it isn't one of our options that God hopes we will take, it is in fact the door of salvation.

And here is where we get to the two sided part of Jesus' gift. First, **Jesus' open door of salvation is for us...**

Jesus says in verse 8 "I know your deeds (Philadelphia). See, I have placed before you an open door that no one can shut."

Now there is a link here to the words Jesus uses to introduce Himself in verse 7. There He says “These are the words of Him... who holds the key of David. What He opens no one can shut, and what He shuts no one can open.” So verse 7 and verse 8 share several linking words and this isn’t a mistake. So what is this key that Jesus holds that opens this door?

While at first this seems a bit mysterious actually there are two scriptures that Jesus is pointing to with these words. And both these scriptures bring light to what He is saying. The first is just a couple chapters back where Jesus introduced Himself for the first time. There He said:

I am the Living One; I was dead, and now look, I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades. (Revelation 1:18)

So the keys Jesus holds control life and death. When Jesus suffered the cross He did it with a plan to overcome and the power to achieve it. And when Jesus rose from the dead He defeated death and so won the keys that can lock death out for good. That means Jesus is the one who determines when death enters the picture, not the devil or anyone else. Jesus is sovereign over life and Jesus has used those keys to open the door of salvation for us.

So Jesus is saying Philadelphia and Fort George, “The keys I’ve won for Myself have locked the door on death and opened the door to life. See, there it is, go through My door to experience salvation and eternal life. This is what Jesus says to the faithful church.

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There is a second textual connection here that expands this even more – the words “the key of David” are important in verse 7.

These words refer back to a text the Philadelphian Christians, many of whom were Jews, would have known well, and it is found in Isaiah chapter 22. Now let me set up the context for this passage briefly before we actually read it.

King David was a godly man – a man after God’s own heart.⁴ And he got this title because he used his power to lead Israel towards God and His law. And as a result of his leadership Israel expanded and enjoyed the Lord’s favor.

And so throughout the Old Testament David is used as a picture of the coming Messiah – they said the Messiah will be a king like David.⁵ And the term “house of David” became a shorthand way of referring to the kingdom of God.⁶ Now the Kingdom of God includes everything God wants to give us, both now and forever.

⁴ Acts 13:22; 1 Samuel 13:14

⁵ Jeremiah 23:5

⁶ Zechariah 12:8 see also Johnson, pg 109

But by the time Isaiah was writing David was long dead and now Hezekiah, another righteous king, had come to power. And in his kingdom there was a man named Eliakim who was given the honour of holding the keys to David's house. Picking it up in verse 20 we read:

"In that day I will summon my servant, Eliakim son of Hilkiyah. I will clothe him with your [King Hezekiah's] robe and fasten your sash around him and hand your authority over to him. He will be a father to those who live in Jerusalem and to the people of Judah. I will place on his shoulder **the key** to the **house of David**; what he opens no one can shut, and what he shuts no one can open. (Isaiah 22:20-22)

So Eliakim was the steward of Hezekiah who was given the authority to open or close the kingdom to whomever he wanted. And Jesus says I'm the new Eliakim. I hold, not **a** key, but **the** key to the kingdom because in fact I am the King.

And so Jesus says "See. Look. Behold, I'm opening a door for you that no one can shut. When I died I took everything that excluded you from the kingdom. And then I rose again defeating death and Hades. And I offer my victory to you. I offer you the open door to salvation that I won! No one else has the key to the kingdom so come, enter through Me! In fact I am the door."⁷

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Now this would have been incredibly encouraging to the Philadelphians and it should be to us as well.

The church in Philadelphia had experienced many religious doors being shut in their faces. In verse 9 we read:

[Read Revelation 3:9]

So there was a large Jewish population in Philadelphia, but they weren't real Jews because they had rejected God's Messiah – they had shut the door of the synagogue on Jesus' followers.

But Jesus says these Jews are going to come and fall down at the Christians feet; they are going to acknowledge that God loves them. In other words they are going to come to Christ through the Christians they opposed.

So Jesus says don't worry when the doors around you shut in your face. The door that I open is the only one that is important. So come in and be saved, come in and become a pillar in God's temple. Enter through My open door.

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And this is a command. So Jesus is saying don't be afraid, don't let anything keep you from going through the open door I have for you.

⁷ John 10:9

Yes there will be opposition. Doors will shut in your face if you follow Me. There will be dangers, but don't be afraid of what is through the door. Don't be afraid of the unknown. Don't hide inside in a holy huddle. Don't wait for things to get safe because Jesus holds the key and He has opened the door. So go through it. Fort George move forward; embrace the future and the full riches of the Kingdom that I have for you. Go through the door.

That's the first meaning of the open door that Jesus commands Philadelphia and us to go through. It is the door to the house of David; it is the door to the kingdom of God. And this is Jesus' gift for us if we follow Him.

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But this isn't the only gift or even the main gift of this passage. **Jesus' open door of salvation is for us and for us to give away.**

While God does offer us His open door of salvation, the main thing He gives us in this passage is the opportunity to offer His door of salvation to those around us. This is the main point.

Now here I want to return just briefly to what we said about the way Christians often speak about "open doors."

While there are no references in the New Testament to God leading us through open doors, there are lots of texts about Jesus' opening doors for us to spread His Gospel about the kingdom.

And I want to point you to just a few of these. In 1 Corinthians Paul wanted to visit the Corinthian church, but then he wrote:

But I will stay on at Ephesus until Pentecost, because **a great door** for effective work has **opened** to me, and there are many who oppose me. (1 Corinthians 16:8-9)

In his next letter Paul wrote:

Now when I went to Troas to preach the gospel of Christ and found that the Lord had **opened a door** for me... (2 Corinthians 2:12)

Just one more. In Colossians Paul wrote:

And pray for us, too, that God may **open a door** for our message, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ, for which I am in chains. (Colossians 4:3)

So in each situation Paul desired to share the Gospel and then watched for God's open door of opportunity. So the open door Paul talks about refers to God making people receptive to His Gospel. That's what the open door refers to throughout the New Testament.

Note that it is God who opens these doors. It isn't Paul's desires that are primary, but God's making a way for His Gospel to be received that matters. And Paul's, and our, blessing comes as we are able to partner with what God is doing as He expands His kingdom.

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So if you are someone who is constantly sharing your faith you need to know that sometimes God hasn't opened the door and people aren't receptive to His Gospel. In those situations we can actually hurt things by trying to force it. And you've probably met people who aren't helping as they try to evangelize.

But that's not most of us. So on the other hand if you are a Canadian and so hardly ever share your faith, you need to know that God is opening doors around you to give His salvation away. Don't miss out on this blessing! Because God's gift isn't just for us, it is for us to give away. There is nothing more rewarding than leading someone to Jesus.

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A final thing to note here is that sometimes open doors come with opposition. Paul faced this and the Philadelphians were facing this, but opposition doesn't mean the doors are closed. In verse 8 Jesus commends the church saying "I know that you have little strength" to stand against the opposition you are facing, but you are still moving forward – and Jesus was proud of this church.

So in spite of their little strength, or actually because they knew they had little strength and so were relying on God, God was pleased to open the door for them to extend His kingdom.

And this is the blessing Christians get – we get to partner with Jesus in saving the world – not because we are saviours, but because the Saviour is constantly opening doors for us to share Him with those He has placed us beside.

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We will close with this: Fort George **Jesus' open door of salvation is for us and for us to give away.** So let's be a giving away church. Let's be a church like Philadelphia that makes Jesus proud. Let's look for Jesus' open door into our city and go through it with boldness no matter what stands in our way because we know the One who holds the key.

And while what lies through the door is unknown let's not hunker down in fear. Let's not wait for things to be safe. Let's unblock our eyes and see the door Jesus has opened that no one can shut. Let's partner with Jesus in giving away His salvation.