

# THE CHURCH OF THE OPEN DOOR

Revelation 3:7-13

Last week we listened to the sound of Christ knocking on the door! We inclined our ear to his voice as he spoke the most gracious words of invitation imaginable, “***Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me***” (Rev. 3:20). That was an invitation to enjoy fellowship with the Master and to abide with him forever as he takes his rightful place on the throne at the centre of our life.

Here in our Lord’s letter to the church in Philadelphia the picture is quite different. Once again, a door is involved, but this time the Master is not knocking. He has taken firm control of the door, and he is holding it wide open. What can this mean?

Let us begin by acknowledging that there is something unappealing about closed doors. They are like roadblocks that bar the way to something desirable. Open doors are inviting. They present opportunities for us to explore possibilities and broaden our experience of knowing and serving the Lord. Open doors are exciting and inviting!

Now, the Lord presents himself as the one “***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.***”

First, let’s consider his holiness. This means that he is separate from his creation. He is not a created being, but the Creator of all things. He is not to be confused with the natural world in any way. He relates to and rules over all creation, but he is distinct from it. Second, he is separate from all evil, free of all moral contamination and corruption. Of course, this is the kind of life to which he calls us: “***Be holy, because I am holy***” (1 Peter 1:16).

Along with his holiness is his absolute veracity. He is true. This has many shades of meaning. He is genuine and real, not a pretender and a deceiver as are others who claim to be Messiah. Moreover, he is reliable and trustworthy. Because of his nature and very being as the “way, the truth, and the life,” Jesus can neither lie nor lead people astray. The imagery, then, is reassuring. All of this means that this door, which he holds open, cannot be a door of deception or a door of doom. It’s Christ’s door! Jesus, during his earthly ministry, said, “***I am the gate for the sheep ... whoever enters through me will be saved. He will come in and go out, and find pasture***” (John 10:7b, 9). Now he places an open door before his people. It is a door not only of salvation, but also of freedom, and of opportunity.

A powerful clue to our Lord’s authority is his statement that he “***holds the key of David.***” In order to understand this statement, we must refer to Isaiah 22:15-22, where the king’s unfaithful servant, Shebna, was deposed and replaced with Eliakim. Eliakim became the king’s treasurer and chief advisor. He controlled all access to the king and to the royal treasury. Our Lord is virtually saying that he controls all access to the Father in Heaven (“no one comes to the Father except by me”), and that he controls access to all of Heaven’s resources. When someone with that kind of authority and power opens a door unto us, we should listen and we should take it. Imagine! A door to Heaven’s boundless resources thrown open to us!

An Eastern king once described his method of dealing with criminals who had been convicted of a capital offence. "I have them led into an execution chamber where they are given a choice: execution by hanging, or a closed door at one end of the room!" His listener asked, "What lies beyond the door, and how many choose it?" The king replied, "Beyond the door lies freedom! But how few prisoners choose it! Most would rather choose certain death than risk the uncertainty of the door."

How tragic it is that so many people are reluctant to choose the open door of Christ! Instead of focusing on Him, they tend to focus on the uncertainty of their present situation. They are prone to feel inadequate, that they are unprepared and not ready. They may feel that they are too small and too weak to embark on any adventure for the Lord.

This could have been the attitude of the church in Philadelphia. We know from historical records, and from our Lord's words in verse 8, that they were not a large church. Their members had been thrown out of the synagogue, in much the same way as the man born blind in John 9. When given his sight by the Lord, and when he subsequently testified on behalf of the Lord, he was expelled from the synagogue. This was the lot of the Philadelphian believers. But Jesus assures them that although they have little strength being few in number, because of their faithfulness he will vindicate them. They will triumph! It is Jesus who controls all access to the Kingdom, and opportunities for service, not the rulers of the synagogue.

One of the things that are so fascinating about the city of Philadelphia is how it was located in a strategic spot in Asia Minor. It lay at the juncture of key trade routes leading to Mysia, Lydia, and Phrygia. It was known as the gateway to the East. The imperial authorities had taken advantage of this strategic positioning by using Philadelphia as a base from which to spread the Greek culture and language to Lydia and Phrygia. The Philadelphians had been so successful in that task that by early in the first century A.D. the Lydian tongue had been replaced by Greek as the only language of the country.

Now, Jesus, the Supreme Authority over all authorities, is choosing Philadelphia as His base from which to spread the Gospel. He is opening a door for the Gospel, and all the Philadelphian Christians have to do is walk through it. There will be danger, but they will be protected by God Himself.

I cannot read verse 10 without being reminded of our Lord's prayer in John 17:14-15:

***"I have given them your word and the world has hated them, for they are not of the world any more than I am of the world. My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one."***

Interestingly, persecution did continue for the Philadelphian Christians, but they did not waiver. They were not removed from their trials and tribulations, but they were protected through them. The Gospel spread throughout all parts of their world. The Church of Christ was greatly multiplied. History records that over the next two centuries the number of Christians grew into the millions. This is what happens when believers focus on the Lord and trust him enough to walk through divinely opened doors.

What about us today? Will we walk through open doors our Lord has placed before us? There are some who say we are not ready. There are things we need to do internally first. There are relationships to be mended and wounds to be healed. This is true enough. But God's people can be relational and missional at the same time. We can be small and powerful in Christ at the same time. All things can be accomplished through faith and trust in Christ.

Last Monday evening nineteen of our people gathered to brainstorm about ways and means of reaching out to the lost with the Gospel. They are ready to go. We must join them. We are never so close to our eternal destiny as when we are glorifying God by worshiping Him and by inviting others to recognize His greatness.

Last week we were called to open the door in response to the knocking Christ. This week, the call is to walk through the open door that he holds wide open. We must answer the call.