

# An open door

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[ 0 : 00 ] Well, let me welcome you all to this Lunchtime Bible Talk. If you haven't been here before, a particular welcome. And if you haven't had lunch, there'll still be some lunch left at the end.

We've reached the fourth in our series on the seven churches in Revelation. These seven churches in Roman Asia, which the Apostle John probably had particular oversight of, and the risen Lord sends back the whole book of Revelation.

Let's just make messages to each of the churches. We've come today to the church in Philadelphia. So if you turn to page 1029, please, that's chapter 3, verse 7, and we'll read the passage.

Revelation chapter 3, verse 7. And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write, The words of the Holy One, the True One, who has the key of David, who opens and no one will shut, who shuts and no one opens.

I know your works. Behold, I have set before you an open door, which no one is able to shut. I know that you have but little power, and yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name.

[ 1 : 19 ] Behold, I will make those of the synagogue of Satan, who say they are Jews and are not, but lie. Behold, I will make them come and bow down before your feet, and they will learn that I have loved you.

Because you have kept my word about patient endurance, I will keep you from the hour of trial that is coming on the whole world to try those who dwell on the earth.

I am coming soon. Hold fast what you have, so that no one may seize your crown. The one who conquers, I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God.

Never shall he go out of it, and I will write on him the name of my God, the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which comes down from my God out of heaven, and my own new name.

He who has a near, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. Now let's pray together. God our Father, we praise you that the Holy Spirit has given us the Scriptures, that this book that so fully and faithfully points us to the Lord Christ himself.

[ 2 : 36 ] We pray as we listen to those words spoken to a church long gone, but yet also spoken to every church in every age throughout the generations, we pray that we may indeed hear what the Spirit is saying to the churches.

Open our eyes, Lord, to see what you have for us. Open our ears to listen, and work upon our will so that we may obey, and indeed that we may endure to the end, and not be ashamed before him at his coming.

We ask this in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. Amen. Many years ago, when I was an English teacher, I used to mark for the exam board, and one of them, it wasn't a delight at all, it was an endurance test.

Every May, hundreds of papers would arrive to be marked, and ordinary life went out of a window, as you had to sit and mark these papers.

Very often, among rather dreary rubbish, you'd come across some absolutely brilliant piece of writing, and it would reassure you again that human nature had something to be said for it.

[ 3 : 57 ] In many ways, this letter to the church in Philadelphia, after the rather mixed bag of the other churches, is something like that. This is an A-starred church, if you like.

It's not me who's saying that. It's the risen Lord's verdict on it. There is not a word of criticism. We'll come back to that in a moment. Now, I said earlier on that the order of the churches probably has no deep spiritual significance.

It has geographical significance. The messenger would arrive on the coast at Ephesus, strike north to Smyrna, then come again southeast to Pergamum, and Thyatira, and Sardis, coming closer to the coast at Philadelphia, and then down to Laodicea, and back to Ephesus.

So, he comes now to this city of Philadelphia, a city which was full of temples, and marked by a particular hostility between church and synagogue.

That explains the verse 9, the synagogue of Satan, who say they are Jews and are not, but lie. In that particular city, the hostility between Christians and Jews was very intense.

[ 5 : 10 ] Now, I also said that like Smyrna, it has no criticism given of it. Now, that does not mean it's perfect, because you'll notice at the end of the letter, in verse 12, the one who conquers, the one who perseveres.

In other words, even in Philadelphia, it's necessary to have a personal faith. It's necessary to have a commitment that will persevere. See, you mustn't think that if you're in a living church, then you're alive yourself.

It's easy to go with the flow. Whether it's a living church or a dead church, it's always much easier to conform, to fit in, to sink into the background.

No, so this good and godly church, the risen Lord says, the one who conquers, there's always a personal responsibility. But above everything else, this is the church of opportunity.

I have set before you, verse 8, an open door, which no one is able to shut. And that's really what we're going to look at for the next moments, the open door. This is the church of the open door.

[ 6 : 17 ] And the first thing is, it is God who opens doors. Now, if very often in our lives, you have, we have situations where we don't know quite what to do.

Maybe the offer of two different jobs, maybe a chance to move one place rather than another. And all these kinds of situations. And we talk about knocking on doors or pushing doors to see if they open.

Now, these doors are opened by the Lord. So what does it mean, I have set before you an open door? What is the open door? Well, first of all, it's the door into the kingdom itself.

And that's the point of verse 7. The one who has the key of David who opens and no one will shut who shuts and no one could open. The reference here is back to Isaiah.

Isaiah the prophet in chapter 22 and to a man called Eliakim who became the steward of King Hezekiah and was given the key to the king's palace. That's the background.

[ 7 : 18 ] The open door is, first of all, the key into the kingdom. And here, the lamb, who is the descendant of David, opens the door into his kingdom.

It's a very, very important point. The Lord opens the door into his kingdom. That's where it all begins. It's interesting, if you read Romans chapter 15, 11 and the following, Paul says, the son of David is already reigning over the nations.

He's reigning over the nations as people all over the world come to Christ. If you like, enter the open door. And that's the idea here. And at the end of Revelation, the one who is the root and offspring of David calls people to come.

The spirit and the bride say come. It's at the end of the book. And that's what gospel work is about, calling people to come through the open door. Peter says in his letter, come to him.

Not come to church, not come to a body of people. Come to him, first of all. The one who opens the door, the door into the kingdom. And that's the first important door through which you might enter.

[ 8 : 27 ] But the other thing is the open door to make disciples of all nations. The one who has the key of David opens some doors and closes others.

Example, in Acts 16, Paul and his friends wanted to go to Asia. And Paul says, the spirit of Jesus would not allow us. Now, of course, that didn't mean that Asia didn't need the gospel and wouldn't get the gospel.

After all, the fact that some 30, 40 years later, John is writing to these churches in Asia shows that Asia did receive the gospel. But at that moment, God's purpose was for the gospel to come to Europe, to the town of Philippi, beginning the great missionary movement which eventually brought the gospel to our shores.

And when we think of it, you'll see Paul lands at Philippi. And because Paul landed at Philippi, that is the human reason why the gospel reached these islands. It's in the hands of the one who holds the key of David and places us all who he wants us to be.

Now, the open door, therefore, is the door of evangelism, the door of spreading the kingdom. Not everybody does that, as it were, full time. But all of us are called in our work, our homes, everywhere we are to open the door to all we meet.

[ 9 : 55 ] Sometimes it will be by direct evangelism. Other times it will be by befriending people. Now, of course, these two things are not contradictory. There's no point in simply befriending people and never sharing the Lord with them.

On the other hand, sometimes people can buttonhole strangers and insensitively put them off the gospel. The two things go together.

Lord Jesus told us to go into the world and make disciples, not to go into the world and be nice to everybody, although obviously sometimes that is where evangelism begins. So the key, the God who opens the doors, opens the doors into his kingdom and he encourages those who enter that kingdom to open the door to others or at least to show them to the door.

And that's the point of the verse I quote, the Spirit and the Bride say come. The Holy Spirit of God calls people. The way he does it is through the Bride, that's just to say through the church.

And that's the first thing then, it is God who opens doors. The second thing is there will always be opposition. You have little power, verse 8, you have kept my word, you have not denied my name.

[ 11 : 10 ] Now, Paul recognizes this in an interesting verse in 1 Corinthians 16, he says this, a wide door has opened for effective work. I've been writing for the Corinthians, I almost certainly have said a wide door has opened for effective work, but there are many who oppose.

Paul doesn't say that. Paul says a wide door has opened for effective work and there are many who oppose. That's very deliberate. The and rather than the but because the two go together.

When a wide door opens for effective gospel work, Satan will be there to oppose. So, if Satan is active, then we know that the door is open.

Satan will try to prevent people entering the door. Satan will try to close the door. When the church begins to wake up, then Satan begins to wake up. When the church is dead and apathetic, Satan can let the church do its own demolition job.

But when the church begins to wake up, as in the church in Philadelphia, then Satan is active. Now, notice that Philadelphia is apparently not a particularly strong church.

[ 12 : 22 ] verse 8, I know you have but little power, but little strength. I mean, after all, in a sense, no church is very strong.

A few hundred or so people spoken to, think about the thousands who are never spoken to, the thousands, the millions who pass the doors all the time, never enter, never listen.

Think about the forces of secularism and godlessness and think about the sheer unbelief and the lack of concern about the gospel in our country as well as in other countries.

Of course, this is where God's strength is evident. Next week, we're going to look at Laodicea who were so proud and self-sufficient, so flourishing, growing numbers, plenty money, they didn't have any room for the gospel at all.

This is a church which is weak, but it knows its weakness. That is the point. It's not pretending to be something. It isn't, it's not pretending that it can do the converting.

[ 13 : 33 ] It's trusting totally on the one who has the key of David. And it is their faithfulness which has provoked opposition. Look again at verse 9, verse 8, sorry, you have kept my word and have not denied my name.

Notice the two things go together, keeping the word and not denying the name because it is through the word that we know who the true Christ of the Bible is and therefore don't deny his name.

And obviously it attracted virulent opposition from the synagogue who say they are Jews and are not. Very careful language there. Notice he's not anti-Semitic.

He's not anti-Jewish. He is talking about elements in the synagogue in Philadelphia who are virulent in their hatred of the gospel. That gives even greater point to the one who has the key of David after all.

Jewish people, some of the Jews in the synagogue at Philadelphia condemning the Christians probably for being heretics, probably even being Johnny come lately and all the rest of it.

[ 14 : 45 ] It's to this church that the risen Lord says I have the key of David. You are preaching the true gospel, the gospel of Abraham, the gospel of David, the gospel which culminated in Jesus Christ who himself is born a Jew.

You see, you have kept my word. And of course this is the battleground today as it so often is, the Bible and its proclamation. Because without the Bible we do not bring a saving message to the world and we do not bring an edifying message to the church.

Without the Bible we have nothing to give to the world because without the Bible we do not have the Christ of the Bible. It's not we're presenting people a book as such.

It's saying, in this book you will find the living Christ. This written word will lead you infallibly, inerrantly to the living Christ who will save you.

That's what we're saying. So, it's the honor of Christ's name, the only Savior, the root of David, the one who opens and closes doors. Part weakness, opposition, but notice enemies will be challenged.

[15:57] Verse 9, again, behold I will make those of the synagogue of Satan who say they are Jews and are not but lie. Behold I will make them come and bow down before your feet. They will learn that I have loved you.

Make them bow down could mean two things. It could mean if they remain unrepentant they will be judged and they will realize you were telling the truth. It could also mean that they will bow in repentance and themselves go through the door.

After all, all of us are enemies to begin with. While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Christ died for us when we were his enemies.

They could do as that Jew Saul of Tarsus did. Go through the door, be reconciled to God and the one who died for us when we were his enemies and when we were sinners.

So, and in a sense, this is what the gospel is saying, isn't it? Accept judgment now to avoid judgment then. Bow now in repentance and faith and avoid the judgment then.

[17:02] And it's here that the call to persevere comes. Verse 10, because you have kept my word about patient endurance, I will keep you from the hour of trial that is coming on the whole world.

The hour of trial that is coming upon the whole world, first of all, has a general significance. No one in this world lives without trial. No one in this world lives without tragedy. No one in this world lives without difficulty.

I will keep you during these times, possibly refer to specific times as well, perhaps times of persecution. But the point I want you to notice is verse, you have kept and I will keep.

You have kept my word, I will keep you. Now that's not tit for tat. You've kept my word, so I'm going to keep you. These are two sides of the same coin.

The reason you are keeping my word is because I am keeping you. I think that's the important point. It's not that our faithfulness earns God's protection, it's that our faithfulness is an evidence of God's protection.

[18:08] Just as Jude says, keep yourselves in the love of God, and then his doxology at the end to the one who is able to keep you from falling. We know we are kept because we are keeping.

I think that's the point here. So, it's God who opens the doors. There will always be opposition, and finally, the end is secure. This is verse 11.

I am coming soon. Hold fast what you have. How is their faithfulness possible? It's only possible because Christ is coming soon.

Soon. Nearly 2,000 years have passed since these words were written. How can we possibly take this seriously? Remember, Revelation is an apocalyptic book, and the word soon in apocalyptic has a particular emphasis.

It means, first of all, it's going to happen. It is absolutely certain. Nothing can prevent it. But it also means that every generation has to live as if they were the generation who will be alive when the Lord returns.

[19:20] Obviously, one generation will still be alive when the Lord returns. And since we don't know what that generation will be, as Jesus himself had said back in the Olivet Discourse, be ready because in the hour that you do not expect, the Son of Man will come.

So it means it's certain. It means that we have to live in expectation of it. And that's the end is secure. And the promise to the church says two things about that end.

Two complementary, not exactly opposite, but first of all, the one who conquers I will make a pillar. Those suggest stability and permanence, the end of ruthlessness and alienation.

which is our lot on earth. But there's also eternal newness. I will write on him the name of my God, the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem which comes down from my God out of heaven and my own new name.

Revelation loves to mix its metaphors to show that the reality is bigger than we can imagine.

creation. The new creation will be permanent but it will also be endless new developments as God

keeps on creating and revealing himself to us.

[ 20 : 44 ] The new creation. You see, rest does not mean idleness. Rest means a situation where we'll be able to explore forever, to all eternity, the new things that God has to reveal.

That's going to be developed at the very end of the book in the new creation chapters, chapters 21 and 22. Glimpses of this on earth but fullness in the new creation.

You see, if we just take one of these, if we have too much security, then we can, frankly, become boring. Get stuck in ruts and traditionalism and fossilizing and so on.

If we have too much newness, we become butterflies, never settling anywhere. These two are going together just as that great other mixed metaphor, the lion who is also the lamb, the city who is also the bride and so on.

As we finish, just three quick observations. First of all, look for the Lord to open doors. Not necessarily missionary work in the strict sense but opportunities to bring the son of David, to use the language here, to the people.

[ 22 : 01 ] Keep his word, which means, of course, loving and honoring Christ and wait for his coming because the more firmly we believe that Jesus Christ will one day wind up the affairs of this world and usher in a better one, the more necessary it is we continue on all lawful and worthy activities until he comes.

Amen. Let's pray. Lord God, we thank you for this small but vibrant church in Philadelphia, this church which recognized its weakness and therefore became strong in the Lord.

Help us in our weakness and vulnerability to indeed look for those doors and not to be afraid to go through them in spite of the opposition. and help us indeed to be among those who will not be ashamed before him at his coming.

We ask this in our Saviour's name. Amen.