

The Christ Who Opens Doors

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- [0 : 0 0] Please do turn to your Bibles, and we're in Revelation, chapter 3, and looking at verses 7 to 13, that's page 1029, if you're using one of the blue visitor Bibles, and the letters of the church in Philadelphia.
- So Revelation 3, and reading from verse 7. And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia, writes, 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 not denied my name.
- Behold, I will make those of the synagogue of Satan, who say that 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.
- [1 : 3 2] 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, and 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 an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. Amen. May God bless us tonight with his words.
- Good. Well, please do turn back to Revelation, and to chapter 3 to the 6th of the seven letters. See the churches in Asia.
- So Revelation 3 and verses 7 to 13. Now the task of Christ's church in every age, and including ours, seems daunting, doesn't it?
- [2 : 4 8] The task of declaring Christ's lordship over all, of calling people to repent because they're rebels facing the judgment of God.
- That task seems overwhelming, doesn't it? When we consider the scale of the task, the numbers of people, the difficulties we face, the opposition that we encounter, it overwhelms us, and it's easy to be discouraged, isn't it?
- We feel small and weak and seemingly not making much progress. I think the church in Philadelphia felt a bit like that.
- Huge opportunities for the gospel, but they were small, and they felt it. Now, strategically, Philadelphia was in a prime spot.
- The city was the gateway to the east, located on a major road. It was known as a missionary city. Established two centuries before Christ, it was an outpost originally for Greek culture.

- [3 : 55] So the Greeks established the city there as their outpost to Asia. It was the base from which Asia was to be evangelized with Greek culture. And a few centuries later, the church in Philadelphia was to be a missionary church in that missionary city.
- That was the task. But they were small and weak in the world's eyes, and they felt it. Jesus acknowledged the reality.
- Look at verse 8. They felt and were puny, at least in their own eyes and to those around them in the city.
- What does the Lord Jesus Christ say to a church like that? A church aware of the scale of the task, but also aware of their significant limitations.
- Well, this lesson in Revelation chapter 3 is here to encourage such a church. The church then, and today, will have its eyes lifted from the present circumstances and perceived weaknesses to the Lord Jesus Christ, who reigns, who is sovereign, and who opens the door for the gospel.
- [5 : 14] So we have one main point this evening, and then four implications that flow from that. So the key point is this. Jesus is sovereign over his eternal gospel kingdom.
- And then four implications. Therefore, he determines gospel opportunities. Therefore, he overcomes gospel opponents. Therefore, he sees our gospel faithfulness.
- Therefore, he safeguards his gospel servants. So four implications flowing from that one key point. So firstly, then, our key point. Jesus is sovereign over his eternal gospel kingdom.
- Look again at verse 7, where we have these words about the Lord Jesus Christ. He introduces himself. 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.
- Jesus is presented as the Holy and True One. Jesus is set apart above all others, pure and spotless in righteousness.
- [6 : 31] He is the True One, the faithful one, the genuine one, the only Messiah. And it's the next description of Jesus that is particularly significant.
- And at first glance, it seems a bit obscure, doesn't it? He is the one who has the key of David. Now, to possess that key, well, it was to have complete control over the gospel kingdom.
- To possess such a key was, in Old Testament terms, to have administrative responsibility for the kingdom of Judah. This mention of the key of David, it refers to an incident recorded in Isaiah chapter 22.
- The king at the time, King Hezekiah, had a chief steward who was called Shebna. He was the prime minister of the land who ruled on behalf of the king.
- But Shebna was just not up to the task. He was to be removed from office and replaced by Eliakim. Now, listen to these words from verse 20 of that chapter in Isaiah.
- [7 : 43] It says this, In that day I will call my servant Eliakim, and I will clothe him with your robe, and will bind your sash on him, and will commit your authority to his hand.
- And he shall be a father to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and to the house of Judah. And I will place on his shoulder the key of the house of David.
- He shall open, and none shall shut, and shall shut, and none shall open. This Eliakim was given the key of David.
- And it meant that he had absolute control over the kingdom. He determined who could come in and who could go out. He would open and shut the door. Nobody else but the one who had the key of David.

And Jesus, likewise, has been given the key of David. But with far greater and far more significant responsibility than Eliakim ever had.

[8 : 45] And here in Revelation chapter 3, this Isaiah reference presents Jesus as the Davidic Messiah, with absolute power and control to the entrance of the gospel kingdom.

Jesus has the key. He has the key to the household of God. He is the one who opens. He's the one who shuts the door to God's gospel kingdom.

Jesus Christ is the sovereign key holder. And that means that he alone determines who comes in and who doesn't.

He alone is in charge. Not us. He alone is in charge. Not Satan. He alone determines who and who will not enter his eternal gospel kingdom.

That is the great truth that is set out at the start of this passage. Jesus, he is the one who's in control of the kingdom.

[9 : 46] He is the one who has the keys. He opens and shuts the door. He does that. So four implications then flowing from that one truth.

Jesus is the sovereign over his eternal gospel kingdom. Therefore, verse 8, he determines gospel opportunities. Look again at verse 8.

I know your works. Behold, I have set before you an open door which no one is able to shut. The sovereign Lord Jesus who has the key of David, who opens and no one shuts, has set before the Philadelphian church an open door which no one can shut.

Now, this open door language is used in several places in the New Testament. And at times, it means that there is an opportunity for gospel advance. You see it in Acts chapter 14 and 1 and 2 Corinthians and again in Colossians.

And in that final reference, the apostle Paul in Colossians writes to the church there and he urges them. Pray also for us that God may open a door for the word to declare the mystery of Christ.

[11 : 06] An open door represents an opportunity to preach the gospel, to witness to Christ. It is an opportunity determined by the sovereign Lord.

And that means that nothing can take that opportunity away. So yes, this church in Philadelphia may be small and weak looking.

But the opportunity for gospel progress has nothing to do with their power or their influence. It doesn't matter how big they are or how small they are.

The Lord Jesus determines an open or a shut door. The sovereign Lord has opened a door for them. No one, nothing can shut that door.

Now think about those Philadelphians receiving that letter. There's maybe a few of them gathered together. They were small. They were puny. They had little power. And they received this word from the Lord Jesus.

[12 : 04] I have opened a door for you. No one's going to shut it. Greatly encouraging for them, wasn't it then, to receive these words from the risen Lord Jesus. Encouraging not only in terms of their opportunities for the gospel, but also for their own security, for their own entry into Christ's gospel kingdom.

Now we'll say a bit more about this later on, but the open door language here is not just used to denote opportunities for the gospel, but also as the access to the kingdom itself.

Revelation chapter 4, our next chapter, begins with a description of a door standing open into heaven itself. So not only does the Lord open the door for gospel opportunities for these Christians, but he opens before them the door to his heavenly and eternal kingdom.

Their access to God does not depend on their power or influence, but on their Christ who has the keys. How wonderfully reassuring for the church in every age that it is Jesus who opens the door.

Jesus opens the door for gospel progress. It does not matter how big or powerful or influential or impressive looking a church is. Christ opens the door.

[13 : 28] Now this doesn't mean, of course, that the church just sits back and waits for doors to swing open with a great neon sign saying door open.

No, we try things. We work hard, don't we? The doors in China didn't look open, and it certainly wasn't easy. But just think about the church there in China now.

Millions upon millions of Christians there today. The doors didn't look open, did they? But people smuggled Bibles in. They found ways.

They toiled hard. And so too for you and I. Because Jesus' sovereign and opening doors does not mean that things will look good or happen easily.

The Philadelphian church looked and felt small and powerless. And I'm sure that in the days after receiving this letter, they were still, in the world's eyes, small and powerless.

[14 : 29] But that didn't matter. The Lord Jesus was opening doors. And he said to them, I have opened a door for you. Now for us, the Tron church here in Glasgow, from one perspective, this looks like a big church.

There's lots going on. But when you step back for a moment, and you see the city of Glasgow beyond the front doors, the hundreds of thousands of people who are walking in utter darkness, the colleagues, the friends, the family, we quite quickly feel small, don't we?

Powerless. When we think about the bigger picture. But we press on, don't we? We keep inviting people along. Keep telling others about Jesus.

The Lord may be opening unpromising looking doors. And if he opens them, then nothing can shut them. No one can shut them.

So yes, we work hard, making the very most of the opportunities that we have, but not in a frenzied, panic sort of way.

[15 : 43] It doesn't depend on us in that sense. But we also cry out, don't we, to the Lord Jesus and ask him to open doors. We pray, we cry out to him.

He's the one with the keys. He's the one who will open doors. So pray to him, ask him. Plead with him to open doors for us in our gospel work.

So that's the first implication. Jesus is sovereign over his eternal kingdom. Therefore, he determines gospel opportunities. But secondly, he's sovereign over his gospel kingdom.

Therefore, verse 9, he overcomes gospel opponents. The church in Philadelphia is reassured that there is an open door in front of them.

But that doesn't exclude the possibility of opposition. The weakness of the church won't hinder the progress of the gospel, for it is Christ to open doors.

[16 : 43] But neither will opposition, the believers face, hinder that progress either. Just look at verse 9. Behold, I will make those of the synagogue of Satan who say that 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. The Philadelphian church was clearly facing hostility from the Jewish community, the synagogue of Satan, as the Lord Jesus puts it.

And these so-called Jews are mocking the faith of the church there in the city. They were likely seeking to distance themselves from this Christian sect. And thereby ensuring that the Christians would lose any sort of protection they might have enjoyed from being associated with the Jews.

The Jews in the Roman Empire enjoyed protection from the authorities. But as soon as these Christians were pushed aside and distanced, well, the Christians would lose that protection.

They were going to face persecution. And these people, they say they are Jews, but they're not. They lie. Jesus, he's not denying their ethnicity, but rather their true status as God's people.

[17 : 56] If they really were God's people, then they wouldn't be denying and opposing Christ's people. So Jesus sees right through their opposition.

He exposes them. But not only that, Jesus wonderfully overcomes gospel opposition. Not only does Jesus reject the false faith of unbelieving Jews, he promised that their opposition wouldn't hinder gospel progress.

Jesus says, behold, I will make them come and bow down to your feet. They will learn that I have loved you. Isn't that a remarkable statement?

That these who were opposing would someday come and recognize that God loves these Gentile believers. Now, this is an allusion to a couple of texts in Isaiah which predict that unbelieving Gentiles would come and bow down at Israel's feet.

Listen to one of those verses from Isaiah chapter 60. The sons of those who afflicted you shall come bending low to you, and all who despised you shall bow at your feet.

[19 : 09] They shall call you the city of the Lord, the Zion of the Holy One of Israel. But the irony here in Revelation 3 is that the roles have been reversed.

It is ethnic Israel who will come and bow down to believing Gentiles. For the Philadelphians, the very Jews who have been persecuting them will one day come and bow down before them.

They will come to realize how much the Lord God loves them, believing Gentiles. How astonishing that would be for those Philadelphians to hear that.

And Jesus says to us and them, people you never thought you'd win over, you'll win over. Even those who at the moment are fiercely opposing, they will one day come to see how much the Lord loves you.

They will come to realize that you are loved by the Lord God, that you, small Christian church, have been ushered through the door that only Jesus can open and enter the kingdom of heaven.

[20 : 13] Jesus promises that he will cause unbelievers, even unbelieving Jews to acknowledge that God's love is upon the followers of Christ.

Even those most fierce and vocal in their opposition to the gospel can be brought to the point where they can only but bow before the Lord's people, the people they once persecuted and confess God's love.

Wasn't that the Apostle Paul's own experience? One who opposed fiercely God's people. But came to worship alongside them, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Having opened a door for gospel ministry, Jesus assures his church then and today that through the witness of his weak-looking church, even some of those most fierce in opposition will be among those who are saved.

Isn't that a greatly encouraging truth? God can save even those fierce opponents. God can save even those who are saved. So there's a second implication.

[21 : 21] He overcomes gospel opponents. Thirdly then, Jesus is sovereign over his eternal gospel kingdom. Therefore, verses 8 and 10, he sees our gospel faithfulness.

He sees our gospel faithfulness. As we've seen again and again in these letters to the churches in Asia, the Lord Jesus Christ sees his church.

He knows his church. And so he sees their faults and their flaws. He sees their sins and shortfalls. But he also sees their faithfulness.

Remember the church in Sardis we looked at last week. Although the church in Sardis was complacent, there was a remnant within that was conquering.

There was a faithful few and the Lord saw them. As well as seeing the slumber of the many, he also saw the steadfastness of the minority. He saw it.

[22 : 24] And likewise here in Philadelphia, Jesus saw their faithfulness. Yes, they were perhaps small and weak looking, but Jesus sees their loyalty to him. Listen to those words again in verse 8.

Again in verse 10. Because you have kept my word about patient endurance, I will keep you.

Jesus sees their faithfulness. And he honors it, doesn't he? Because you have kept, I will keep you. No matter our status or stature in this world, no matter how small and weak we may feel, we can take great comfort in knowing that Jesus sees even the smallest act of obedience.

He sees the refusal to deny Christ that nobody else sees. He sees the patient endurance that no one else seems to notice. But Christ notices.

He noticed the small church in Philadelphia. He saw their faithfulness. And he sees yours. He sees yours. And that leads to our final implication.

[23 : 46] Jesus is sovereign over his eternal gospel kingdom. Therefore, he safeguards his gospel servants now and forever. This is verses 10 to 13.

Look again at verse 10. Jesus writes, Because you have kept my word about patient endurance, I will keep you from the hour of trial that is coming in the whole world to try those who dwell on the earth.

He goes on, verse 11. 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 and the name of my city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which come down from my God out of heaven and my own new name.

Jesus is sovereign. And he promises to safeguard his gospel servants both now and forever. Firstly, the now.

[24 : 54] That first section I read, verse 10, it's speaking primarily of spiritual safeguarding, a spiritual protection in this world. Nowhere in Revelation are believers promised immunity from physical suffering.

But rather, we are promised spiritual protection in the midst of current trials and tribulations. And this hour of trial that he refers to here, I think that's referring to the end time troubles and tribulations which have already started in the first century and will continue until Christ returns.

And so Jesus promises that as we keep his word, as we patiently endure, as we go about making the very most of the doors that Jesus opened for ministry, he will keep us now in this world, in this life, he will keep us secure and safe spiritually.

He will guard you and protect you. Not from trials and tribulations, but through them, in the midst of them. He will keep you safe.

And as we wait for his coming, we are to hold fast, hold steady through the tribulations of this world. And that's the now.

[26 : 19] But Jesus also promises future safeguarding for all eternity. To the one who conquers, Jesus will make them a pillar in his temple. They'll be given the name of God, the new Jerusalem of Jesus himself.

Those who endure now will live permanently in the eternal temple, the new creation, the city of God, the dwelling place, in which God himself dwells.

Jesus Christ has the key of David. He opens the door to the eternal gospel kingdom. He promises his faithful church that eternity awaits.

Eternal security, permanently, in the presence of God. That is our hope, our destiny. no matter how small and feeble we may look and feel now, no matter how much like the Philadelphians we may be like, those with a little power, we can take great comfort that our patient endurance now is worth it and the Lord will honor it.

our steadfastness in the midst of trial now will be worth it. Our witnessing in the face of opposition now will be worth it.

[27 : 42] This is what the Lord Jesus promises all those who hold firm to him, who trust him in the midst of difficulty now. Eternity awaits in his kingdom. Jesus is sovereign over his eternal gospel kingdom.

He has the key. Therefore, he determines gospel opportunities. He sees your gospel faithfulness.

He overcomes gospel opponents. But he also safeguards his gospel servants. Fear not, little flock.

For it is your father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. And he can. And he will. So trust him. No matter how small you may feel.

Let me pray. Our father God, we thank you that you see all, that you know all, and that you are sovereign over all.

[29 : 03] Lord, you know the opportunities that are in front of us. You know how daunted we feel so often by all that we see and all that needs done. You know how weak and powerless we sometimes feel.

people. But Lord, encourage our hearts this evening to know that you are the great sovereign Lord. And that you make great promises to your people.

That you are able to keep them. So help us to trust you in the midst of our smallness and weakness. To trust you to make the most of every opportunity you give us to proclaim your lordship.

to proclaim the great gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. So help us please for we ask it in Jesus name. Amen.