

# The Church in Philadelphia

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[ 0 : 00 ] And before we have our reading this evening, I just want to make a few introductory comments in relation to what we'll be talking about.

And I wanted to start with a word about the promises of God. And I don't know whether you know this, and I slightly wonder about the kind of person who would do this kind of exercise.

But there is a person who has calculated that in the whole of the Bible, there are 8,800 promises to believers.

And when you think about that, 8,800 promises to believers. And I guess the thing about the promises of God is they're really great, and they're amazing.

And yet, some of you will imagine that you heard a promise from God, and it never came to pass.

[ 1 : 01 ] I used to walk my dog with a lovely Christian woman who was utterly convinced that she would marry Cliff Richards.

And unfortunately, nobody had told Cliff Richards this, as far as I best know. And I mean, when I say it, you know, I'm not trying to create mirth. She truly, truly believed it.

And I mean, I'm going back 30 years now, I've no idea whether she still thinks that. But she thought that God had promised her this. Or again, another dear man who I was so privileged to have on the staff of the church in Cheshire Boys, where I was the minister.

It's a man called Kenneth Buxton. A man who came from, I don't know whether you're aware of this, but there were two very dominant families in sort of 19th century evangelicalism.

The Barclays and the Buxtons. And they both owned stately homes that they handed over for Christian work, and gave and donated millions.

[ 2 : 17 ] And Kenneth himself had been a medical missionary in the East Africa revival. And I mean, I was even younger then.

And to have somebody of that depth and quality around was such a blessing to me. And he came to me one day and said that their daughter lived in Winchester, and they liked the idea of moving to Winchester, because Christchurch Winchester kind of suited their theological predilections.

It's an evangelical church, and Kenneth's family were an evangelical family. And so he came to me and said, we found the house that we believe God has promised to us.

And things went on, you know, forgive any lawyers that are in the house, but, you know, you can take a while, frankly. And so it went on, it went on and on.

And in the end, the whole thing collapsed. I mean, this is a hugely mature Christian, knocked me into a cock-tack then and now, who had felt that God had given this promise, and they'd worked along those lines.

[ 3 : 42 ] I think the vendors were slightly out to manipulate that. Kenneth thought it was a good idea to tell them that they felt God had led them to this house.

They felt, oh, so we can keep charging more and more, and he'll still pay. It's a world in which we live, isn't it? But when you think about the promises of God in your own lives, I'm sure there will be people in the house tonight, you don't have to shout out, who have felt that God has promised things, which it feels like they've been let down.

Have all those promises been spent? Is there anything left for us in the 21st century? Well, of course there is.

Some people have said to me they thought that maybe all those promises have been used up over the years of history. I think there are two controlling factors that we need to think about in relation to the promises of God.

One of them is a widely misunderstood, and frankly, a lot of people feel let down by this. I mean, even in our reading tonight, the risen Christ says, I'm going to come soon.

[ 5 : 02 ] The word soon, I think, is challenging, because in our language, it speaks very strongly of something imminent.

Of course, we're bound to interpret the word like that. That's what it means in our understanding.

But of course, not every culture who stalk the planet has a linear view of time.

And actually, the word soon carries as much meaning as certain as it does soon. And I think that if you can kind of hold that thought, you may save yourself a lot of theological sweat wondering why some of the things that Jesus said would happen soon haven't yet happened.

The other controlling factor, of course, is the faithfulness of the believer. Do we believe God's promises? Some of you more cerebral people will be thinking to yourself, well, you know, I need evidence.

Before I could really trust the promises, I'm going to need evidence of that. Somebody was telling me the other day they were preaching about revelation.

[ 6 : 21 ] I mean, the idea that God reveals himself. And they were saying, is revelation such a difficult thing in our modern world where people are taught a kind of philosophical idea called empiricism.

And that is, I will only accept as true those things that I can prove to be true through my sensory perception. Because the Bible inverts that totally.

Whereas the world says, seeing is believing, no, the Bible says, believing is seeing. You've got to take a step of faith before God opens your eyes.

But I don't want you to leave here tonight thinking, oh my goodness, if the promises of God rely on my faith, I'm basically stuffed. And I'll tell you why.

Because the New Testament, Mark 11 in particular, makes it very, very clear that when the Bible's talking about faithfulness, it's not asking me to do a kind of internal audit and try and work out how big is my faith.

[ 7 : 28 ] No, the question for you is, how big is my God? Very different approach, I think. Believing is seeing.

So the promises of God, and what we'll see in this letter to the church in Philadelphia is three remarkable promises that the risen Christ makes to the church in Philadelphia.

Just a little word about the church in Philadelphia. It is the modern city in Turkey of Al-Ashehir. It was built by Eumenes II, but named after his son, Attalus.

Attalus II was nicknamed Philadelphos, which is where the city gets its name from. As far as cities go, it was a bit like the Milton Keynes of the Middle East.

It had been built relatively recently compared to a lot of the cities that figure in the Book of Revelation. It was known to be an area that grew very fine grapes, although I don't know what your view of Turkish wine is, but my view is it's just about bearable in Turkey but probably not worth bringing it home.

[ 8 : 50 ] But by reputation, the grapes are very good. Goodness knows what they do with them, but I mean, you know, they start off with good raw materials. Attalus II handed the city over to the Roman Empire.

And for a while, the city was called Neo-Caesarea. It's a place that is dogged by earthquakes. And remember, last week, we mentioned a huge earthquake in Turkey which took place in AD 17.

Well, that same earthquake did a lot of damage in Philadelphia. And it tells us in verse 3 this sort of slightly beguiling phrase in there that I know your deeds.

Remember, that's what the risen Christ said to the church in Ephesus. I place before you an open door. Come back to all this. I know that you have little strength. I mean, I wonder what that means. I'll tell you what I think it means. I think what it means is it was not a big church. If you go to Al-As-Shehir today, you can go to the site where the basilica that was the earliest Christian church was built.

[ 10 : 14 ] It was just kind of two piles of rocks now. There's not much that's worth seeing. But I wonder what the risen Christ meant by this. I know your deeds.

I see place before you an open door. I know that you have little strength. Most of the commentators on this passage don't see that as a criticism.

Did they mean that there's very little spiritual strength? Well, it would hardly be a commendation, would it? And the rest of the letter to the church in Philadelphia seems to be generally encouraging rather than discouraging.

I think it means that the church was small and limited. When it was handed over to the Romans, the first thing they did was build a massive temple dedicated to the emperor Tiberius.

And so it became a kind of center of the Roman cult. Not long after Christ ascended into heaven. I mean, you may know this, but it wasn't part of Turkey for a very long time.

[ 11 : 29 ] It was part of Greece. And in an effort to kind of undermine the Romans, it became a center where people tried to enforce Greek culture on the people who existed in the city.

And apparently did it very successfully. I mean, I admire that. As somebody who's been a bishop for a year, I can tell you that changing culture for 20 years, changing culture is a huge task.

Huge task. And yet these people, you know, managed to offload Greek culture upon them. It did make me think, just finally, by way of introduction, it did make me think.

And I don't know about you, but it does feel like, you know, I've heard preachers, I think I may have done it myself on occasions, comparing the lot of Christians in 21st century Great Britain to the people of God in exile in the Old Testament.

It all feels very strange. You know, what does it feel like to be a stranger in your own land, as it were?

[ 12 : 38 ] What must that have been like for the people of Al-Shahir, of Philadelphia? what's it like for us today? And it does feel a bit like, I think you would agree with me, without going into the realms of controversiality, that actually, in the culture that's going on at the moment, I'm not just talking about woke stuff, I mean the general culture stuff, not a lot of evidence that the church is kind of, I don't want to use the word winning, but you know what I mean if I say that.

So without much more ado, let's turn to the text and I've asked Jim if he'd come and read to us Revelation chapter 3 verses 7 through 13 and then we'll go straight to the text.

Thanks Jim. Thank you. To the angel of the church in Philadelphia writes, 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. 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. I will make those who are of the synagogue of Satan who claim to be Jews though they are not but are liars.

[ 14 : 09 ] I will make them come and fall down at your feet and acknowledge that I have loved you. 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.

I am coming soon. Hold on to what you have so that no one will take your crown. the one who is victorious, I will make a pillar in the temple of my God.

Never again will they leave it. 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. Whoever has ears, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. Amen. Amen. Amen. Thanks, Jim.

So, what I want to try and get across to you tonight is that the risen Christ makes three fundamental promises to the people of God.

[ 15 : 23 ] The one is they're promised an open door. the second one is I will vindicate you from your enemies.

And promise number three is I will make your true identity apparent to all. So, the promises of the risen Christ, we read at the beginning of the words, we read this, that these are the words of him who is holy and true.

Holiness is ascribed to God a tremendous amount and you will know that in Ephesians chapter 5 and verse 1 we are invited to be imitators of God.

I don't think that means that we're invited to be little tin pot gods in our own right. What I think it means is that we are to emulate the character of God as revealed to us in Jesus Christ.

Christ. The word holiness in our culture I think has something of a mixed press. When I was a little boy on Wednesdays I went to the same house my mother's business didn't allow her to be around on a Wednesday.

[ 16 : 45 ] I'd go to the same house and have tea with my friend Paul Raffo whose father owned a pub which had a it's a northern thing a crowned green bowling green and we used to play on that for a bit and do get up to all kinds of pranks and we'd come in and before supper we'd lie on the

carpet in front of the black and white television and watch Lassie.

Anybody remember Lassie? Do you? Yeah shows how old you are and Lassie I mean two young lads you know we used to lie there trying desperately not to cry at the moving bits and then we'd have she'd prepare supper and every time every occasion she would do the same things and that was Heinz spaghetti on toast in tomato sauce and it was very nice the thing that puzzled me was I'd never seen this before or since but poor Raffo always used to put vinegar on his spaghetti that's not my point my point is one day we came in early and remember there used to be children's newsreel on the telly at five o'clock and so we were introduced to this little Indian man who was a sadhu in Hindi that means a holy man and this holy man wasn't he didn't have a lot of clothes on as I recall he had kind of slightly baggy underpants and just arrived in front of camera wearing those bowed at the camera then he lay down on the ground and they put a door on top of him and then a London bus came and drove over him and then they took the door off him and this little man gets up and bows to the camera this is a holy man right this is my seven year old brain at work if that's holiness count me out

I can do without not being run over by a bus this word holiness doesn't occur a huge amount in the letters in fact I think this is the only reference to God as holy and true and we're reminded aren't we in a world where truth has adopted a rather subjective definition we are reminded that Jesus Christ who shows us what God is like said I am the truth the way and the life truth is really important and I think one of the things that should really trouble us in our current culture is the way that truth has been subjectified so when Meghan Markle is being interviewed by Piers Morgan and Piers Morgan not an easy chap I guess says calls her a liar what's her response she said well it's my truth as if truth was subjective that what I believe to be true trumps what you believe to be true the holy one and the one who is true who holds the key of David interesting turn of phrase

I think holding the key of David sets what's about to follow in what scholars call the messianic context you don't need to do it now but if you were to turn to Matthew's gospel in chapter 1 I mean you know in those days when we used to have we still do some of us bible reading notes that kind of took us through a whole book in one go and most many of us I think dreaded the idea you know of having to read that long genealogy at the front of Matthew's gospel it's very important because what it's showing is that Jesus is in the line of David and Abraham as a matter of fact and it was prophesied fairly consistently in the Old Testament that the Messiah would be related to David that's why it's important especially to a gospel written for Jewish people to make that link very very clear so next time you read it don't close your eyes and think of England read it you know say this is this is making a very important point about who Jesus is and what it means is that the risen Christ is the key to God's kingdom and will in the end come to that in the end will separate those who are saved that is Jews who accept Jesus as Messiah and born again Gentiles for eternity you are not saved for as long as you kind of retain your habit of going to church now the scripture says that you are saved for eternity and it is only Jesus who opens and shuts the doors that's his authority now the first promise we read in chapter 3 and verse 8 I know you did see I placed before you an open door that no one can shut I know you have little strength that you have kept my word and have not denied my name this idea of the open door we find has two very distinct interpretations throughout history one is that the open door is the missionary challenge to the church

[ 22 : 37 ] Acts chapter 16 and verse 8 we read these words if I can turn them up for you quickly Acts 16 verse 8 it says Paul and his companions travel through the region of Phrygia and Galatia having been kept by the Holy Spirit from preaching the word of God in the province of Asia that seems to have been a door that the risen Christ closed for Paul and his colleagues and in Matthew 28 we're told to go into all the world Jesus says all authority in heaven on earth has been given to me go into all the world and still today a lot of churches usually fairly conservative churches understand the open door to be the missionary challenge to the church there are a group of people some of you maybe some of them called dispensationalists who believe that history is divided into different dispensations and each dispensation is marked by a different characteristic and I'll just show you a slide about that in a moment the other interpretation is that the open door is a reminder that those of us who trust Christ have access to God the Father you remember when Jesus died on the cross of

Calvary at the moment he died the curtain in the temple was rent asunder split in half until that point access to God had been very limited so just a moment the dispensationalist this is the this is the

framework that dispensationalists put over the seven churches that we've been talking about and part of me scolds myself for not mentioning this to you early the first one is the church in Ephesus we're told is the apostolic age there are dates with this so you can look at those the church of Smyrna was the dispensation of the persecuted church the church of Pergamum was the state church remember that the emperor declared the Roman Empire to be the Holy Roman Empire and that existed for nearly 300 years before it came to an end largely thanks to the Visigoths the church in Thyatira is the papal church

AD 590 to 1517 Sardis the reform church Philadelphia the missionary church if you go with the dispensationalist understanding of the open door and Laodicea was the apostate church I'll talk about that next week apostate means that they allow their faith to become mingled with all kinds of poor ideas that are not biblical so the alternative interpretation to the dispensationalist interpretation is Jesus talking about access into the father's presence lovely verse in Ephesians chapter 2 and verse 19 where the great apostle says this consequently you are no longer foreigners and aliens but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets with Christ

Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone did I say I've got that wrong sorry I meant Hebrews chapter 10 and verse 19 not Ephesians forgive me Hebrews chapter 10 and verse 19 we read this therefore brothers since we have confidence to enter the most holy place by the blood of Jesus by a new and living way open for us through the curtain that is his body what the writer of the epistle to the Hebrews is telling us is that the miracle apart from our forgiveness the miracle of atonement is that Jesus has opened the way for all believers to have access to God I think that it's true to say that in the Old

Testament access to God was limited to a few people for particular projects thinking about Moses you know Moses meets God in the burning bush and God gives him his assignment you know kind of small job lead your people out of slavery in Egypt Moses not too sure about that and then God so Moses says I'm not a great speaker so God says well I'll give you Aaron I mean my goodness Aaron was a bit of a mixed blessing wasn't he so this business of access to God is a blessing that I'm not sure we think about enough the Old Testament particular people for particular assignments King David you know danced before the Lord in the spirit and seemed to meet with God in a particular way but now says the writer of the epistle to the Hebrews now if you go with the access interpretation of the open door now all of you if you are followers of

[ 28 : 52 ] Jesus Christ have access to God imagine do we think about that enough I chastise myself as much as anybody in the house for that so the second promise is I will vindicate you from your enemies who are the local enemies well this time it's not particularly I mean there were a lot of a lot of pagan worship going on in Philadelphia but it seems like the main opposition didn't come from then but came from some Jews and here I do want to say I don't want to sound in any way anti-semitic my sister tells me that there are Jews in my family so I don't want to sound in any way anti-semitic and listen to what he says because he's not talking about Jews in general in Revelation chapter 3 he's talking about people who call themselves

Jews but actually aren't Jews and so he's making a distinction between true Jews who according to Paul will play a part in the kind of final events of world history he's differentiating between them he says I'll 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 the local enemies are liars they're making things up about the small Christian community in Philadelphia in the hope that they can see them off and I do kind of you know I think one of the hardest things for us in the Christian church to do is that this business of there are people who own the name of Christ but whose habits and beliefs don't seem to square very well with the way

God has revealed himself in the Bible I mean I was talking with a friend of mine today and saying you know that my friend is a great guy but he follows another form of religion which designates itself as Christian called Mormonism you know I don't want to sound harsh on him or anything like that I really really like him a lot and he wants to help out and you know come and do stuff and I remember when we were when I was involved in running a big global leadership conference we had the big we suddenly got lots of applications from the Mormon church and kind of you know almost you know our kind of nervousness about that was palpable I mean

I don't know whether the board made the right decision or not but in the end they allowed the Mormons to come to conferences and they came in their hundreds what about these people who

you know it would be a difficult judgment for us to make I think but what about people who kind of pose as Christians but are not not particularly speaking about the Mormon church here but there are other people aren't there you know there's people I don't know maybe some of you were members of it there was a group called the Sea of Faith group and the Sea of Faith group were followers of a philosopher who interestingly supervised me in philosophy when I was at college a man called Donald Cupid and Donald Cupid basically said there is no such thing as God in any objective sense but actually if we look at the history of tribal religion what we discover is that what people do is they take what are the virtues of the tribe and transfer them onto somebody they call God or their gods and Cupid was even more patronising because he said that's not a bad thing you know if it encourages people to behave better why not but don't be fooled into thinking there's anything like a real

God this man was a dean of Emmanuel College in Cambridge and interestingly enough despite his radical views about Christianity the only church service he would attend was a book of common prayer communion service which most people would say is a fairly conservative thing to do in this day and age so Donald Cupid gathered quite a following amongst church members in the church of God particularly the church of England and it was tolerated and they set up little groups and lots of churches that mostly wouldn't have gone anywhere near his teaching set up these groups and basically made sport of denying just about everything that was in the Bible can't have miracles can't have Jesus risen from the dead can't have any of this stuff you know if it helps people to behave better ethically fair enough but don't believe there's anything objectively true about it all and then the risen Christ makes this extraordinary assertion let me read it to you speaking of these Jews who are not

[ 34 : 53 ] Jews who are liars he says I will make them come and fall down at your feet and acknowledge that I have loved you and we find verses in scripture where this kind of threat is issued to Gentiles but this is not about Gentiles it's about Jewish people who've lost their way and are persecuting the church and the risen Christ is saying it is these counterfeit Jewish people who will come and prostrate themselves before you find that extraordinary and then just briefly there are three characteristics that the risen Christ mentions of a church that's faithful when under attack one is patience one is endurance and one is obedience let me just tell you what the risen Christ says since you kept my command to endure patiently I will also keep you from the hour of trial that is going to come upon the world to test those who live on the earth the risen Christ then goes on to say something really important for our culture he says firstly chapter 3 and verse 10 a great trial awaits that is generally thought to be the judgment that all human beings will go through and the risen Christ says believers will be saved through the trial not from it we're not going to be excluded there are some people who read that verse and think that

Christians will be excused the judgment because they'll be involved in the rapture not that I don't believe in rapture but I don't have time tonight to go into all that the great trial arose believers will be saved through the trial and not from it again chapter 3 and verse 10 and then we come to that word again verse 11 I am coming soon well it's been a while hasn't it if you interpret it solely as time on a linear basis if you think of it more as kind of the certainty of God's coming then you know maybe God's timing is a little more perfect than ours though if the risen Christ came to the modern city of Al-Shahira I'm not sure that he'd find a big Christian presence there anymore if any I'm coming to you certainly and then

I have to just say a word about this it says that our identity will become clear to everybody I'm coming soon hold on to what you have so that no one will take your crown him who overcomes I will make a pillar in the temple of my God never again will he leave it I will write on him write on him right those if you have an aversion to tattoos listen up I will write it on him 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 him my new name I think we're in a real mess in our culture over identity and I think what we do is we kind of clutch at straws to identify ourselves and the Marxist idea is that every relationship has an imbalance of power and they've developed that idea in our culture today whereby there is this idea of what's called intersectionality and intersectionality means that if I have an identity to myself which makes me look oppressed in any way then I will get points which can be assessed as to how much my identity needs to be paid attention to by governments in terms of policy I mean when I think about it I think I've got quite a lot of ancillary identities not main identities but ancillary ones

I'm a man I'm a father I'm a husband I'm a Christian the most important part of my identity and I think what the risen Christ is saying here is for a Christian the most important part of their identity is their relationship with God through Jesus Christ there is no other identity that trumps that sorry I don't like using the word trump too much these days and in the confusion of all that I mean I think it's really helpful to have a very basic idea if you are a disciple of Jesus Christ your identity is primarily in your relationship with him you are a child of God an adopted child because of your sin but a child of God nevertheless and I think that what we're seeing in our society is huge confusion over the whole idea of identity and it kind of creeps its way into modern institutions as an article today in the

[ 41 : 21 ] Times written by Melanie Phillips who I know has a kind of slightly acerbic pot of ink that she dips into occasionally but what she's writing about is Google's latest exercise in the diversity and we used to say equality do you remember that word that's not right now it's equity right do you know what the difference between equity and equality is do you I'll explain it if you don't but so equality is everybody ought to be given the same chance to kind of prosper to rise above the things in their lives that maybe have held them back and equality was understood to be opportunity I mean you could say it's about opening doors for people that's why we believed in a national education system and all that equity is the goal of trying to make sure that everybody's outcomes are the same you say well where did you see that

I said well I do remember Tony Blair thinking that everybody should have a degree do you remember that which I thought was a vain hope A but B you know I'm not going to you know rubbish degrees from some universities but honestly I don't believe they're worth the paper they're written on in terms of employment opportunities so into this soup of identity confusion oh yes I was telling you about Google so Google programmed their latest algorithm on the basis of their diversity equity and inclusion policies and when it came to it they discovered that all the tutors in this artificial intelligence thing there was no representation of anybody who was white because part of their programming it was to program the algorithm to exclude anybody who could be described as having white privilege they've had to very quickly change it apparently and now you know there might be the odd appearance of a white person in this but

Melanie Phillips is you know ranting against this and saying it's really destructive idea very confusing etc etc so all I'm making the point is that our identity is in Christ 2nd Corinthians chapter 5 and verse 17 the great apostle says this therefore if anyone is in Christ he is a new creation the old is gone the new has come all this is from God who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation or Galatians chapter 2 and verse 20 we read these words sometimes I stumble my way through the Bible and think somebody's taken books away from him Galatians chapter 2 and verse 20 says this I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live but Christ lives in me the life I live in the body I live by faith in the Son of God in my view you couldn't have a more wholesome or clear statement of identity than those two verses so there we have the church in Philadelphia there we have a small church who are faithful and obedient in the face of provocation and persecution to whom the risen Christ appreciates their effort and makes these promises to them open door I know that some of you

I hope you do this but you know the business of God's guidance I think is not at all uncomplicated and I think Anthony and I always kind of work with an open door closed door perspective a bit like you know when Paul was in Acts 16 when it says a door closed on Paul and he couldn't go to where he thought God was taking him we've always tried to kind of push doors and I remember before I was appointed to the parish that I was rector at we went for a visit and we got a baby with us for some reason did we yeah anyway I can't remember which one but one of them and so Anthony turned out with this little bundle and the church warden's wives kind of took her off and cooed and cuddled with the little baby and I was grilled by the church wardens and

[ 47 : 16 ] Anthony had already made it clear to me that she wasn't quite sure whether this was the kind of place that we should go to and so I was I mean even by my standards I was outspoken at the interview they said to me something like your predecessor was very good at keeping people together and you know so I said well if that's what you want I wouldn't really be the best person to do that you know you need to understand that not just me but if me and the leadership of this church the church council felt that a course of action was right and we voted for it after discussion and prayer I would go for it even if some people didn't like it you're all looking at me like thank god you're not our vicar but I do feel that always felt that that if the leadership of the church had got

clarity about the vision

I used to say at the beginning of the year to the congregations if you don't like what we're shining a light on in relation to our vision I don't mind you not like it you don't have to like it but don't stay in this church and complain about it P.S.

if you want a dead church I know lots I can give you the addresses I never said that so look we're you know I'm in an houring about this parish and I said I got in the car and I'm pretty sure I said to Ante something like well you can write that off your list I'm sure they won't want me and the next day the patron called me and said you put a cat amongst the pigeons said why he said well the bishop doesn't want you to go there he said but the church ones are adamant it's you they want so we went there largely on the basis that we pushed at a door which we were completely unsure of was on the other side of it and it opened so we walked through it and probably I think I can say this I probably had the most enjoyable nine years of my ministry what a gift open doors are whether it's the door that opens on the missionary opportunity that we have my goodness we need to give some attention to that or whether it's in individual guidance the fact we have access to God to help us in these decisions that we have to make so very very very very very quickly just a quick quick summary

I'm not going to go over all these points but just to remind you of what we've learnt so far just look at the first slide you don't need to don't need to go to talk about those the next slide the same and the final slide I do just want to say first thing is God is faithful and his promises are true second thing we learn from Philadelphia is we don't have to cave into our enemies but I do think that the Bible would have us lovingly confront our enemy people who are enemies of Christ you know in the epistle of Peter we're told to contend for the truth do you feel equipped for that you're content for it people say wild things about the faith don't they

I can remember the photocopier at work people find out you're Christian they say I think the whole thing's you know for hypocrites right I always thought to myself never said it well if we're all hypocrites why don't you come along because one more isn't going to make any difference we can face the coming trials with confidence in Christ whatever trial you're facing in your life now you can face with confidence I went to Musgrove Park hospital in Taunton the other day to see my dear dear friend George who's had a horrid stroke and he's an Irish guy so he's got the blarney and he can't speak and you know I mean the thought of that for my dear friend is a horrid thought but he's as brave as a lion he's facing his future with confidence because he trusts

[ 52 : 14 ] Jesus Christ and they you know they coming up with these kind of pathways for rehabilitation for him and George has just said I don't want any of these just get me some palliative care and let me go home I don't know what trials you're facing I guess there'll be some people in the house who are facing them listen you will do much better to face those trials with Jesus then you will without him Philadelphia reminds us that God calls us to fullness of life to joy but that doesn't mean that the Christian way is always an easy life and finally and most importantly if you're a disciple of

Jesus your identity rests in that objective truth Jesus died for your sins as Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians chapter 15 so there we are the church in Philadelphia and next week the last one one do this thing to and to