

PM John 10:1-30 & Revelation 3:7-13 The Church in Philadelphia

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[0 : 00] From the Gospel of John chapter 10. The Gospel of John chapter 10.

! Truly I say to you, he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door but climbs in by another way, that man is a thief and a robber.

But he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. To him the gatekeeper opens. The sheep hear his voice and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out.

When he has brought out all his own, he goes before them and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice. A stranger they will not follow, but they will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers.

This figure of speech Jesus used with them, but they did not understand what he was saying to them. Jesus again said to them, Truly, truly I say to you, I am the door of the sheep.

[1 : 17] All who came before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture.

The thief comes only to steal and to kill and to destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly. I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.

He who is a hired hand and not a shepherd, who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees. And the wolf snatches them and scatters them.

He flees because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep. I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me. And I know the Father.

And I lay down my life for the sheep. And I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also. And they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd.

[2 : 19] For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again.

This charge I have received from my Father. There was again a division among the Jews because of these words. Many of them said, he has a demon and is insane.

Why listen to him? Others said, these are not the words of one who is oppressed by a demon. Can a demon open the eyes of the blind? At that time the Feast of Dedication took place at Jerusalem.

It was winter, and Jesus was walking in the temple in the colonnade of Solomon. So the Jews gathered around him and said to him, How long will you keep us in suspense?

If you are the Christ, tell us plainly. Jesus answered them, I told you, and you do not believe. The words that I do in my Father's name bear witness about me, but you do not believe because you are not part of my flock.

[3 : 25] My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father who has given them to me is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand.

I and the Father are one. And so on. May the Lord add his blessing to the reading of his own holy word. This is from the book of Revelation, chapter 3.

You see it there. It's Revelation, chapter 3, and we'll read verses 7 to 13. Revelation, chapter 3, at 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 words and have not denied my name.

[4 : 43] Behold, I will make those of the synagogue of Satan, who say that they are Jews, but are not, 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, which 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, 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 the Lord add his name. We'll turn back now to the second passage that we read, from Revelation chapter 3, at verse 7, and I'll read it again.

[6 : 01] 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 put little power, and yet you have kept my word, and have 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 down, 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, 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.

[7 : 17] He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. Amen. I was saying this morning, that I go regularly to Turkey, to support the church there, and I'm sure that we know, that the seven churches, in the book of Revelation, these seven churches, that Jesus sends letters to, through their pastors, and that seems to be the meaning, of this word, this phrase, the angel of the church.

He's writing to the pastors, of these seven churches, and through them to the congregations. So these seven churches, were all in what is now modern Turkey.

So because I go regularly to Turkey, I like this part of the Bible, and today we're looking at this letter, that Christ sends to the church in Philadelphia. Of course nowadays most people, when they think of Philadelphia, they would think of the city in America, but this is the Philadelphia, that was in what's now western Turkey.

And the one who writes this letter, to the church, is called the Holy One, the True One. This is the one who's sending this letter to them. He is holy.

He is as far removed as possible, from everything that is corrupt, everything that is unclean. We think about the world around us.

[8 : 48] There is so much in it that is good. And we live in a country, where it's easy for us to see, the great beauty of creation, even round about us. In this part of the world, as you travel out of the town, we live in a beautiful country.

We know that human beings, whether they're believers in Jesus or not, they are capable of showing kindness towards one another, putting aside their own interests, for the sake of others.

We know that the image of God in us, has not been totally destroyed, by the fall. But we know, that for all the good that there is in this world, there is also a lot that is bad.

It starts in our own hearts. There is the selfishness, there is unnecessary, unjustified anger. There is lust for more and more of what this world offers us.

There are other sins that we ourselves know that we are guilty of. We see that there is sin at a national level, there is injustice, there is war. There are whole peoples around the world who are oppressed.

[10 : 03] Whatever we are in the world, we can see that there is sin that corrupts us. It corrupts we ourselves, it corrupts us ourselves, it corrupts our nation, it corrupts the whole world.

Sin does have an influence over us, whether we like it or not. But then we turn to the Lord, and we see that he is absolutely different.

He is all goodness, he is all truth, he is all purity. When we are tired with ourselves, when we are tired with what we can see is wrong in our own characters, we can look to Christ, and we can ask him to fill us with his own holiness.

He takes our sin, he gives us his purity instead. And this applies just as much to those of us who might have been believers for many years, just as much as it does to those who don't yet know the Lord as their saviour.

Because even those who have been believers for decades, we can slip back, we can lose that closeness to the Lord that we first had. So that we don't reflect his holiness as brightly as we should.

[11 : 23] We don't reflect his character in the way that we used to. But he can change that for us, because he himself is this holiness. He is the true one.

This means partly that he is true to his word. He is faithful. When he says something, we can rely on it without question.

He is trustworthy. And this is such a comfort when we feel as if others have let us down or deceived us. It isn't possible for Christ to do that, because truth is at the heart of his character.

If he stopped being true and faithful, he would stop being God. And we know that's not going to happen. But there's more to these titles of the holy one and the true one than just describing his character.

In Revelation chapter 6 at verse 10, we can see there, the souls of those who have been martyred for God, they're described as being under the altar of the temple in heaven.

[12 : 42] And John tells us that he heard them calling out in a loud voice, how long sovereign Lord, holy and true, until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood.

Now they're speaking to God, and they're giving him these titles, holy and true. So here in Revelation, when Christ calls himself by these titles, he's telling us that he is God, that he is equal with the Father.

And this is one of those verses that lets us know, almost by the way, that the Lord Jesus Christ is God. Just as much as the Father is God, just as much as the Holy Spirit is God.

The three are one. We worship the one God. But Jesus is God, just as much as the Father is. And by calling himself holy and true, he's reminding us of that.

He shares the same characteristics, the same powers. He's entitled to the same honor and glory as God the Father is, as God the Holy Spirit is.

[13 : 53] And so the one who is holy and true, the one who is pure and good, the one who is utterly reliable and trustworthy, the one who is God himself, he is writing to this little church in Philadelphia.

Philadelphia. The Christians in Philadelphia would have been very well aware of their own weakness. Philadelphia was a fairly small city. The area was regularly hit by earthquakes.

So few people would deliberately choose that as a place to live. And of course, if the city was small, well, that meant that the church was small as well. But we see how much the Lord thinks of them and how much he values them.

Out of the seven churches in the book of Revelation, only Smyrna in chapter 2 and only this church in Philadelphia are the ones that, they're the only two that the Lord does not criticize in any way.

Maybe they're few in number, but how faithfully they have served him. And what great opportunities he's given them. What a reward he is storing up for them.

[15 : 02] There's such a contrast between the church in Philadelphia and the church in Sardis, which he writes to at the beginning of this chapter.

Jesus tells the church in Sardis, you have the reputation of being alive, but you are dead. Such a contrast between how he praises the church in Philadelphia and the way he spoke to the church in Sardis.

So these people are small, the congregation is small, but they're faithful. And as we look at this letter to the church in Philadelphia, there are four key words that stand out for us.

And they are doors, synagogues, trials, and pillars. Doors, synagogues, trials, and pillars.

The first part of this letter has a lot to say about doors and about opening and shutting. And verse 7, who has the key of David, who opens and no one will shut, who shuts and no one opens.

[16:13] That's looking back to the Old Testament, to the prophecy of Isaiah. Chapter 22 and verse 22. And there the Lord is speaking to a man called Eliachim.

And to encourage him, he sends him a message through the prophet Isaiah. 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. So although that prophecy was given in the Old Testament, it's fully fulfilled in Christ.

We read that passage earlier on where Jesus calls himself the door, the door of the sheep. So what he's telling the believers in Philadelphia and us too is that he is the one who decides who comes into the kingdom of heaven.

He sees those who are proud, who are arrogant, who are sure of themselves, and he shuts the door to them.

[17:14] He sees those who aren't interested in following the truth, and he shuts the door to them as well. He sees those who hate his laws, who want to hold on to their sins, and they will be shut out as well.

And what he shuts, no one can open. Philadelphia at the time had a large Greek population. And we know that most of the people in the city would have been Gentiles rather than Jews.

And so it follows from that that the church too would have been mainly Gentile, mainly Greek speaking, rather than Jewish. And the Jews in Philadelphia, most of them, would have looked at this small congregation, looked at the way they tried to follow the God of Israel, and they would have despised them.

They would have had nothing but contempt for them, these dirty Gentiles. To work out how verses 7 to 9 fit together, it helps to think of this image of the door, and opening and shutting.

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.

[18:36] I know that you have but little power, and yet you have kept my word, and have 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. This is God speaking here. The Jews in Philadelphia would have claimed that only they would be allowed to come into God's kingdom, because they were God's chosen people.

God loved them. He had given them his law. They had kept it. The Greeks, these Gentiles, well, they were pagans. They were heathens. God couldn't possibly love them.

But the Lord is making very clear in these verses that he is the one who will decide who comes into his kingdom. Not anyone else. No mere human being has the right to say who will be allowed into heaven and who won't be.

And this Jewish congregation, the Jewish congregation in Philadelphia, he calls them a synagogue of Satan. These are very harsh words.

[19:51] And that was because they had rejected salvation through the grace of God, through Christ. They'd rejected the truth that God had sent them.

And they'll find that that door is shut against them. And because no one, because it is God himself who has shut it, no one will be able to open it.

The door to heaven will be barred to them. But this verse also speaks about an open door. Yes, the Lord shuts the door to the proud.

He shuts the door to those who try to hold on to their sins. But he opens the door wide to all those who are humble, who don't put confidence in themselves. As we read in Matthew 5, Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

Would we want to be pure in heart? Do we really have a longing to be pure and holy? Well, we have that promise. We will see God. The door will be opened for us.

[20:57] No one and nothing will be able to shut us out of the kingdom of God. This open door can have another meaning, of course. There's the door of opportunity.

Maybe this church is small, but the Lord is saying to them that he is at work in their city. There are people in their city who are spiritually hungry, who are just waiting to hear the message of the gospel.

And because God is at work in the city of Philadelphia, his people can go out, confident that the Saviour is going ahead of them, knowing that there will be people who will listen to their message.

So they have an open door. So there are two doors here. There's an open door, there's a shut door. There are also two synagogues here, even if only one of them is mentioned explicitly. There is the synagogue of Satan. Those who claim to be Jews, but who God rejects.

[21 : 59] Now, the Bible has always been very clear that there is only one people of God. In the Old Testament, the church was mainly made up of believers from a Jewish background.

Then Christ came with the good news of the gospel, and it spread out around the world, and more and more Gentiles flooded in. Now we see that the people of God mainly come from a Gentile background, although there are still believers in Christ from a Jewish background as well.

But we have all been made part of this one people. What decides whether someone is part of the Lord's people or not is not whether they've been born in one nation or another.

But what they think about the Lord Jesus Christ. If we believe in him as our Saviour, we are his people. We are heirs of Abraham, even if we're Gentiles.

Those who don't believe in Christ, cannot claim to be the chosen people of God. This false synagogue is full of lies and slander.

[23 : 08] It's tied to obeying the laws, a way of being saved. But it rejects the one who alone is the way, the truth, and the life. In verse 8, we see the characteristics of the true synagogue, although it's not called that.

I know that you have but little power, and yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name. Jesus tells them they have little power.

Now that might not seem like a very complimentary thing. It might not seem like a very pleasant thing for them to have to hear. But this isn't a criticism of them. It's just facing facts.

They were a small group of people in a hostile city. And if we are aware of our own weakness, then this should make us turn to the Saviour all the more urgently, looking to him for the strength that only he can give us.

And even though they are weak, they have kept my word and not denied my name. They have come under pressure to deny the truth, to turn away from it, to deny that they belong to Christ, to deny that they're his people.

[24 : 24] But they have stood firm. Are we able to do that? We might feel as if we're such weak Christians. Well, so were they.

If someone challenges us about what we believe, about why we live the way we do, are we able to stand up and be counted? Are we able to admit who it is that we follow?

It might be difficult, but we shouldn't think that it was any easier for these people here. So there are two synagogues and in the end, those who belong to the false synagogue will be forced to admit that the people they despised, they really are God's chosen ones.

Maybe they'll repent. 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.

I mean, again, this can seem a bit triumphalistic. It could seem maybe even arrogant. But this is not saying that, you know, we'll lord it over other people. It's simply a reflection of how much God has loved us and other people being allowed to see that.

[25 : 41] And if it is God's will, they being made to repent themselves and to come to him for salvation. So two synagogues and the next key word in this letter is trials.

We read that in 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 to try those who dwell on the earth.

There are a number of verses like this one in the New Testament that have a partial fulfillment at different times in history and then a complete fulfillment when Christ comes back again. We remember that Jesus himself speaks about this hour of trial in Matthew 24.

For then there will be great distress, unequalled from the beginning of the world until now and never to be equaled again. If those days had not been cut short, no one would survive.

But for the sake of the elect, those days will be shortened. The believers in Philadelphia are being warned about this time of trial. It shouldn't catch them unawares.

[26 : 49] They should be reassured that the Lord is able to guard his own people. no matter what difficulties they have to go through. As he tells us through Isaiah in chapter 26, you will keep in perfect peace him whose mind is steadfast because he trusts in you.

So there will be trials, but he will be with us through them. The final key word in this letter to the church in Philadelphia is pillars in verse 12.

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 is an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. Philadelphia, as we were thinking earlier, was a city that experienced regular earthquakes.

And actually, most parts of Turkey even today are still very prone to earthquakes. In Philadelphia, temples, other public buildings, they were built with strong pillars to hold the roof up if an earthquake did hit.

[28 : 14] And every time the believers went into one of these buildings and they saw these solid pillars, they could remind themselves of this promise here.

God would give them too an unshakable place in his heavenly temple. If we belong to the Savior tonight, we know what a great thing this is.

He took us from the empty way of life that we had before we met him and he saved us and he changed us and he gave us a future and a hope that is certain, that is unshakable.

Just like these solid pillars in these buildings, they cannot, no matter how big the earthquake is, they would still stand. He has given us a new character and that is what it means when it says I will write on him the name of my God.

In the Bible, the name is not just a label that you attach to somebody, it is a reflection of their character and this is especially true when we are talking about God. The names that he has reflect his character and tell us something about himself.

[29 : 26] So he is going to fill us with his character, with his holiness. And he has given us an everlasting home and a glorious inheritance. That is why we are told that, told here, why he talks about the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem.

That is why that name will be written on those who overcome. That is where we belong. And we will be given this new name of Christ as well, my own new name as he says.

Now we don't know what this new name will be, we are not told. But it probably has something to do with the great glory that he will have as he welcomes countless numbers of his own people from all backgrounds saved by his own blood, his own sacrifice, as he welcomes us all into heaven.

And what is best about this is we will never have to leave. In verse 12, no, yes, verse 12, 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.

Never shall he go out of it. These, the Christians in Philadelphia, they would have felt shut out by everyone. They would have felt excluded. The unbelieving Jews who hated them because they weren't following the traditional religion that had been handed down through the Jewish people.

[31 : 03] But they would have been strange to their own Greek people as well because they had begun to follow this Jewish Messiah. They wouldn't take part in the same religious ceremonies that the Greek pagans took part in.

So they were shut out of both communities. But there was one who would welcome these believers in Philadelphia who would call them to himself, give them a home and never ever shut them out.

And this is the same one who will welcome us tonight if we ask him to open this door for us. So as we finish we have this call as well which is at the end of all these seven letters.

He who has an ear let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. Well it's not at the end of all the letters but it's at the end of quite a few of them.

He who has an ear let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. So let us tonight let's hear what God says to us through this letter to the church in Philadelphia.

[32 : 17] Amen.