

To those who are afraid

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[0 : 0 0] So we're reading from Revelation chapter 3, verses 7 to 13, to the church in Philadelphia. 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.

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. 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.

[1 : 2 8] Here who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. Good morning, everyone. Now, I've just connected the microphone. So, Ian and Beck Mathias, I can see you.

Thumbs up? Yep, okay, you can hear me. Fantastic. Okay, well, we're going to be looking at Revelation 3, verses 7 to 13. Now, it is tough being on the outside.

I remember the experience some years ago of sitting in a room with about six colleagues, those I'd worked with for about three or four years, and sharing my side of the story, and realising that none of them believed me, none of them would support me, and that within that team, I was now completely and utterly marginalised.

Well, maybe you've had an experience like that in the workplace or another scenario. I think all of us, at some time or another, have had an experience like that.

Perhaps in a social situation, where you've felt awkward and uninvited, and people have avoided speaking to you. Perhaps it's in the playground.

[2 : 4 3] Everyone else is involved in a game, but you were all alone. Sorry, here we go. Perhaps at work, shut out from the decision-making process.

Perhaps it's an experience to do with your family situation, living in a broken family, or an experience of singleness or infertility, where you feel excluded.

You're excluded from the joy that you see others experiencing. Perhaps it's at church. You feel like everyone else at church has close relationships, except for you. You know the hurt, and the loneliness, and the powerlessness, and the fear of being on the outside.

One of the most painful experiences in life is simply to be left outside. In the world's eyes, the Christians in Philadelphia were on the outside.

Now, we're not told what was going on in the Philadelphian church, but of the seven churches that John addresses in Revelation, that Jesus addresses in Revelation chapters two to three, Philadelphia is one of only two, which receives no criticism, no rebuke.

[3 : 55] The other Smyrna. Jesus finds no fault with them. Instead, he commends them repeatedly for their faithfulness. In verse eight, Jesus says, you have kept my word and have not denied my name.

Verse 10, you have kept my word about patient endurance. That is, they had endured patiently, just as Jesus commanded. However, this faithfulness had come in the face of struggles.

Verse eight, they were weak. Jesus says to them, I know that you have but little power. Verse nine, they were persecuted by those Jesus calls the synagogue of Satan.

That is by the Jewish community in Philadelphia. Now, again, we're not told what form this persecution took, but I think there are two possibilities and it may have involved either or both of these.

The first of the possibilities is that the persecution involved exclusion from the synagogue. We know that many first century Christians were Jews or were God fearing Gentiles who had previously associated with a synagogue and faith in Jesus frequently led to exclusion from this community that they had formerly been part of.

[5 : 08] But it may have been even more serious than that because within the Roman Empire, Jews had some legal protections to practice the exclusive worship of Yahweh.

And it's possible, perhaps even likely that some Jews in Philadelphia had brought accusations about the Christians to the Roman authorities, exposed them to prosecution for refusing to worship the Roman Emperor.

Whatever the precise nature of the persecution they faced, here was a small struggling church. It was a minority fringe, minority on the fringe of society, a church on the outside.

Now, perhaps you personally are going through something like the Philadelphians. You feel the pressure of being a small minority. You're battered and weary in your Christian life.

Your strength is flagging and it feels like you're just barely hanging on by your fingernails. Well, there's an important encouragement for you in these verses.

[6 : 16] Of course, that won't be everyone here. Some may be new Christians in the full flush of enthusiasm thinking, what's fantastic to be a Christian? Well, if that's you, that's great.

But I think these words will still encourage you. But for others, for who are facing, who are finding the Christian life, a real uphill battle, these words of Jesus today should have special significance for you.

Jesus speaks to those who are on the outside in the world to assure them that they are on the inside with God. You see, a far greater tragedy than being on the outside in the world, much worse is to be shut outside of the city of God.

You know, that the glorious city of John's vision in Revelation chapter 21, the new Jerusalem, where there'll be no more death and mourning and crying or pain because we'll be with God and God will be with us.

Far worse, far more terrible, indeed terrifying is to be shut out of that city. But for the faithful Philadelphian church and for all who keep Jesus' word, Jesus speaks in Revelation chapter 3, not to terrify, but to strengthen and to encourage and fill with hope.

[7 : 36] Now, we won't be able to look at everything in Revelation chapter 3 and Jesus' words to the Philadelphian church. But in particular, we're going to look at four striking images, four striking images, the key, the door, the crown, and the pillar.

Now, none of these images is particularly unusual for us. They basically mean what we expect them to. But I want to suggest, perhaps if you're one of our younger members listening along this morning, these are the four things to listen out for, the key, the door, the crown, the pillar.

And maybe if you're in, you know, in primary school or, it might, it'll help you remember, why not draw a picture of each one and try and write down a few words about what each of them means.

They're the four things. So let's look at each in turn. First, the key, the key. Jesus says in verse 7, and to the angel of the church in Philadelphia, write, the words of the Holy One, the true one.

Now, we'll get to the key in a moment, but first, holy and true. These are Old Testament descriptions of God. God is the Holy One. God is the true one. Here, Jesus addresses the Philadelphian church as the second person of the Trinity, as the one who, together with the Father and the Spirit, shares all the perfections of the divine nature.

[8 : 58] He speaks to us as the Holy One. He speaks to us as the true one. And so every word from his mouth is likewise holy and true. No word of Jesus is unworthy.

No word of Jesus can fail. With that in mind, let's consider what Jesus says in the second half of verse 7. 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 will open.

Jesus has the key of David. Now, what does this mean? Well, a key is a symbol of authority. So there's a 21st birthday custom.

I don't know if it's practiced as much now, but it was when I was younger. 21st birthday custom where parents will give their 21-year-old son or daughter a key. And it symbolizes that now they've come to maturity.

Now they hold new authority. Traditionally, it was the key to the family home. But now they hold a new authority in the family home. The key to the front door. They may come and go as they please.

[10 : 11] Well, the biblical symbolism is similar. The specific metaphor, the key of David, comes from Isaiah chapter 22. And in Isaiah chapter 22, the one who holds the key to the house of David is the steward who's in charge of the palace.

He controls access to the royal city. He controls access to the royal house. He opens to let people in. He shuts to keep people out. Here in Revelation chapter 3, Jesus says, I hold the key.

Jesus is the one who can let you in, into the city of God, into the royal house, into the presence of God and God's king. He has the authority.

When he opens, no one can shut. And what he shuts, no one can open. Now, the pluralism of our day tells us that there are many keys and many doors.

As long as you sincerely believe, you'll enter the eternal city. But Jesus says, there's only one key and he has it. If he shuts the door, no one else can let you in.

[11 : 22] Muhammad does not have the key. Buddha does not have the key. Krishna does not have the key. The key called living a decent life will not open this door. Only one person holds the key and that is Jesus.

Do you know the one who holds the key of David? Well, there's our first image, the key of authority.

The second image is related to the first and that is the door. Verse eight. Verse eight. 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. To the person who has kept his word, Jesus says, I have set before you an open door which no one is able to shut.

Perhaps like the Philadelphians, you feel that you have little strength, little power. You feel overwhelmed by the forces that are stacked against you. The might of this world, the frustrations and disappointments of life, the merciless busyness that just seems out of control, the relentless pressure of temptation.

[12 : 48] If Jesus has set before you the open door, then no one can close it.

This door is non-shuttable. If Jesus has allowed you to enter the city of God, then no one else can keep you from it.

It is simply not in their power to do so. And indeed, the way has been opened once and for all. Jesus' death on the cross has burst open the door to paradise.

Through him, we're invited in, invited to enter the presence of God as one of his forgiven children. And you remember, of course, that dramatic demonstration of this as Jesus died on the cross.

That moment when the curtain in the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. That curtain that had symbolically separated the holy God from sinful people. It was ripped apart.

[13 : 56] The way opened for us to enter the most holy place into the presence of God. Jesus, forsaken on the cross outside, we invited inside into the family of God.

Jesus says, I have set before you an open door which no one is able to shut. And notice how in verse 8, actually, Jesus interrupts what he'd started to say to give this assurance about the open door.

Verse 8, I know your works, it starts, but then it's the latter part of the verse that tells us what those works were. I know your works down to the second half of the verse.

I know that you have but little power and you have kept my word and have not denied my name. There's the works that Jesus says he knows. But before Jesus lists their works, their works, he reminds them of his work.

Behold, I've set before you an open door which no one is able to shut. The door to paradise has not been opened by our works but by Jesus' blood.

[15 : 15] So when you're weak, remember, Jesus holds the key. And when you're weak, remember, Jesus has opened the door. and this door that Jesus has opened, neither man nor demon nor anything else in all creation is able to shut.

They may shut you out of the synagogue. They may shut you out of the workplace. They may shut you out of the halls of earthly power. Let them do their worst. The door to the city of God stands open before you.

What have we seen so far? We've seen the key of authority and we've seen the door of salvation. The third image we're going to consider is the crown.

The crown. It's down in verse 11. Jesus says in verse 11, I am coming soon. Hold fast what you have so that no one may seize your crown.

The promise that Jesus is coming soon is further motivation for us to hold fast what we have. Hold on. Persevere. Don't give up. Don't give up on Jesus.

[16 : 26] Just a little while and we will receive our crown. Now for us, in how we think about crowns, crowns are worn by rulers.

And so the crown is a symbol of rule and power and authority. crowns are more and in the ancient world, other shades of meaning were more prominent. One of those was victory, because the winner of a contest would be awarded a crown, would be crowned.

Now it could be an athletic contest like a race, or it could be another kind of contest, like a contest between performers, between actors or public speakers or so on. And so the crown symbolises victory, or that the crown is the prize that can only be attained through winning that contest.

And we see that motif, that shades of meaning there in the New Testament. But even victory, I want to suggest, wasn't the primary symbolism of the crown.

Primarily in the ancient Mediterranean, the crown is a symbol of honour, a symbol of glory. Now examples of this abound, including in Asia Minor where these letters are addressed to churches in various cities in Asia Minor.

[17 : 46] And examples of this, they're all over the place. So I'm going to give you a couple, but they're so numerous. A city or an association would honour someone for some significant achievement by crowning them, by awarding them a crown.

It could be a crown of gold or a precious medal, or it could be just a laurel wreath. So I think we've got a couple of texts that are going to come up on the screen. So here's the first one.

This is a late first century inscription. It was found on a white marble altar in Kibera in southern Asia Minor. And here's what it reads, this inscription. The people and those engaged in business here honoured Menepus, son of Eutychus, also known as Chrysorus, who served as overseer of the market in the 57th year with a beautiful gold memorial crown.

Artemidorus set this up for his father Chrysorus as a memorial. So what's happened here? This man named Menepus, who's also called Chrysorus, has served as an overseer of the market and those engaged in business in the market have honoured him.

How have they honoured him? By presenting him with a beautiful gold memorial crown. And then Chrysorus' son has kind of made a permanent record of that by setting up this inscription on a white marble altar as a sign of how his father was honoured.

[19 : 16] Or another example, here's a second example. This is from second century description from Thyatira. The Dyers honoured Marcus, Julius, Dionysius, Acleanos, twice crown bearer, who pursued glory since childhood.

So he'd been a crown bearer, given a crown twice. But notice that those other themes are there in this text. Honour, glory, and you can see there, this one we've got actually in the slide a facsimile of the inscription and it's the fourth line there, *de stephanouphoron*, twice crown bearer.

You know, that's our key. But you see what a crown, a crown is a symbol of honour. You present someone a crown to honour them because of something significant they've done, some service they've done to the community or to an association or to a particular group or because of their position.

It's a symbol of honour and glory. The material value, whether gold or whether it's a laurel wreath, that mattered less than the symbolism of the act itself.

In the honour shame culture of the ancient Mediterranean, the supreme value was honour and to be crowned was to be honoured. The crown was a crown of glory.

[20 : 40] Well, in first century Philadelphia, there were no crowns for those who followed Jesus.

Their deeds were not inscribed on marble. Their names would not be remembered. These first century believers shared in the shame of their crucified master.

shame, I think, is the most painful dimension of exclusion. It's easier to live without money than to live without at least some sense that you are known and valued and esteemed by others.

Some sense that you matter. Does that ring true of your experience? Perhaps God's particular calling on your life is exposes you to shame.

I don't want to make a big deal of this in my own experience, but in God's wisdom, he's called me to a form of service in an inter-church ministry on campus with AFES.

[21 : 52] Some would use the label para-church for that, although I don't particularly like that label. But at times, fellow believers, other Christians, shame me for that.

Now, thankfully, I can say, with all honesty, I've never experienced that in this congregation as part of Grace Evangelical. In fact, I've found that my wife and I've received much encouragement here in this ministry, and a patient acceptance that on my part, much of my ministry lies outside this particular congregation of Grace Evangelical.

God's God's God's kingdom. In that view, all that matters is the local church, and inter-church ministry is insignificant.

Well, that's one form of shame that God's particular calling on my life exposes to me too at times. And, you know, it might not seem like much, but there are times that it stings.

Well, perhaps God's calling on your life exposes you to shame. You know, where God has placed you, the gifts God has given you, the opportunities God has given you, what God has called on you to do.

[23 : 15] You know, maybe it just doesn't seem like much in the eyes of the world. Maybe it doesn't even seem like much in your own eyes. Whether or not that's the case, for all of us who follow Jesus, many times the world will shame us.

I was speaking with someone this week who's, they were catching up with a non-Christian friend, and, you know, the non-Christian friend was a bit surprised to find that this, my friend, was still someone who follows Jesus, and loves Jesus, and this non-Christian friend called her Christian friend, called her Christian friend's love for Jesus, cute.

So, Noah, you still love Jesus? Oh, that's cute. What a backhanded compliment if ever there was one. Cute. In other words, infantile, naive, charming, but childish.

You know, like a toddler waving excitedly at a puppy. so that the world, our world doesn't award crowns for faith in Jesus Christ.

But what is of little value in the world's eyes is of great value in God's eyes. So the crown in verse 11, I don't think it's the only place in this passage where we see shame and honour alluded to.

[24 : 43] You see it also in verse 9. Have a look at verse 9. 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. That I have loved you.

You. You. Now, there are further allusions to Isaiah here. Isaiah 49, 60, where there's the promise of the nations coming and bowing down before God's people.

This moment of vindication. Vindication. Jesus himself gives this promise. Jesus himself will see to it that all who are shamed for following him will be honoured and that all who despise Jesus people in this present age must one day acknowledge that the very people, the very ones they despised are the ones Jesus has loved.

So bear the shame for the honour awaits. The I am coming soon. Hold fast what you have so that no one may seize your crown.

[26 : 23] And if you fear you lack the strength to hold fast, well, remember you know that the one who holds the key and the one who opens the door and the one who grants the crown is the same one who will protect you and shield you from any trial or test that would be too great for you to bear.

That at least is how I understand Jesus' promise in verse 10 to keep us from the hour of trial ahead, but we don't have much time to dwell on that now. So what have we seen so far?

We've seen the key of authority, the door of salvation and the crown of glory. Fourthly and finally the pillar of security. Look at 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 God out of heaven and my own new name.

This pillar of security is a particularly apt image for the Philadelphian Christians. The city of Philadelphia was built on a fault line and it was at times devastated by earthquakes.

[27 : 42] When tremors were felt, people would flee the city for safety. But in the city of God, his people would be solid, sturdy, unshakable.

These pillars would never need leave the temple. A pillar in the temple of my God, never shall he go out of it. The Jews in Philadelphia may have driven Jewish Christians from the synagogue, but in God's city they would have a permanent place in his temple.

They would dwell with God and God would dwell with them. In the world they are excluded, welcomed neither by the Jewish community with their synagogue, nor the Roman community with their worship of Caesar.

But in the new Jerusalem they would be at last where they belonged, in the city of God, with the Father and the Son whose names they bore.

Now, friends, Christians may look numerically insignificant. we may not have political clout, we may be laughed at by the world, or worse, just ignored.

[28 : 58] We may seem weak, fragile. Perhaps you feel that way now. But inside the city of God you will be strong and stable as a pillar.

Jesus will make you eternally secure. Inside that city is where you, Christian, finally come home. There's a place for you there.

When you arrive, Jesus will welcome you. He will mark you with his name and with the name of God and the name of the city, the new Jerusalem.

Jerusalem. You have arrived where you belong and you will never again have to leave. And to this weak despised church, this weak church despised in the world, Jesus made these incredible promises.

Jesus holds the key of authority. Jesus has opened the door of salvation. Jesus will adorn you with the crown of glory and Jesus will make you a pillar of security.

[30 : 16] The outsiders in the world have a place inside the eternal city and the temple of God. There, they have honour and security and protection and fellowship with God.

And Jesus promises spur us on so that we may continue patiently to endure. Do not look within yourself.

Jesus says, I know you're weak. Do not look at the opposition. Jesus says, I know it's relentless. But look to our risen Lord Jesus, to the door he has opened for us and to the welcome that awaits.

Look to him who has given us his wonderful promises. I have placed before you an open door. I have loved you. I will keep you.

I am coming soon. Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.