

Revelation Extra: The Church at Philadelphia

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Date: 12 October 2020

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[0 : 0 0] 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've 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.

I'm 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.

[1 : 02] Never shall he go out of it, and I will write on him the name of my God, the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which comes down from my God out of heaven, and my own new name.

He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. Let's pray this morning. Father, thank you for your word. I just pray, Holy Spirit, that you would come and speak a word of encouragement.

I know that there are many people gathered today, and they are hurting, they are suffering, they are in trials, and we just need hope. So speak to us.

Use this letter to encourage our hearts in Jesus, and we ask it in his name. Amen. Amen.

You may be seated.

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Ass Ass Ass Ass Ass Ass Ass months before I became the pastor here at Berea, and I had the opportunity to go to Greece and spend a few weeks working with some Muslim refugees that were fleeing places like Iran into places of Europe. And Greece was kind of becoming this stopping point for many of them. And there were some men who had converted from Islam to Christianity that dedicated their lives to staying there in Greece and ministering to these refugees. In fact, they're still doing that ministry today. What I had the opportunity to do was speak at and observe the baptism service of these new believers, these men who had turned from Islam and put their faith in Jesus Christ.

It was, faith family, one of the most incredible services I have ever been a part of. And what impacted me, even to this day, was listening to those men share their testimony.

[3 : 19] Right before they were about to be baptized, they would share their testimony about their faith in Jesus Christ. And as I listened to them one after the other, one after the other, I noticed a theme that was running throughout all of their testimonies. It was exclusion.

Excluded from family. Their parents would never speak to them again. Excluded from homelands. That is, they would never be allowed to return. Excluded from the promise of safety. That is, if they were to run into the wrong people, they would be physically harmed. They were in a very real way. Excluded. Have you ever felt that way? Maybe not necessarily to that level, but have you ever had that feeling of being cut off? You had that feeling of being cut off, isolated, excluded in some type of way. Almost as though you found yourself on the outside of a door, and no matter what you could do, you could not get in. You couldn't get into that group. You couldn't get into that club. You weren't accepted by whoever it was. You felt in a real way excluded. Your parents said, you were not good enough.

Your friends said, you weren't cool enough. The ride attendant said, you weren't tall enough. The club said, you weren't important enough. The team said, you weren't athletic enough.

The culture said, you weren't young enough. You see, my guess is, Faith Family, that all of us in some way have experienced, whether it was because of your faith, whether it was because of your skin color, whether it was because of your gender, whether it was because of your economic status, whatever it may be, you have felt in some real way excluded. That's exactly what I want you to feel, all right?

If you have ever felt that way, I have good news for you. The Bible has good news for you. There is a church that knows exactly how you feel. It is the church at Philadelphia. Listen to what Jesus says to this church. Verse 7, and to the angel of the church at 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. Now, by now, if you've been tracking with this series, you could almost teach this.

[6 : 19] You know that the introduction of every one of these letters is revealing Jesus in a specific way related to that particular context, right? So to the church that lost her light, Ephesus, Jesus is the one who holds the lampstands. To the church that was in great persecution, Smyrna, Jesus is the one who overcomes. To the church that was under government power, Pergamum, Jesus is the one who holds the two-edged sword. To the one whose idolatry had led to immorality, Thyatira, Jesus is the one with eyes of fire, feet of bronze, that is, the one who purifies His church. To the church appearing alive but dead, last week we looked at Sardis. Jesus is the one who holds the Spirit, that is, the one who's able to breathe life into dead bones. Now, this is not to say that Jesus is whoever you want Jesus to be, but it is to say this, faith family, Lakeville, Venue, everybody, there's no one in your life more relevant than Jesus. You want relevance? You need Jesus. Because whatever answer you have, or whatever question you have, He's the answer. Whatever problem you have, He's the solution.

Whatever dilemma you're in, He is the deliverer. If there is one thing you need to take from the book of Revelation, it's that what you ultimately need is Jesus Christ. Now, how does this relate to the church at Philadelphia? What is this imagery of, I am the one who holds the key of David? This is not terminology that we are likely familiar with, but the original readers of this letter would have known exactly what Jesus was talking about, because this sixth letter, the letter to Philadelphia, has its background in the book of Isaiah. In fact, I am the one who holds the key of David is a direct quote from Isaiah chapter 22 and verse 22. Look at it and tell me this isn't exactly what we see in Revelation 3. Isaiah 22, 22 says, I will place on his shoulder the key of the house of David. He shall open and no one shall shut. He shall shut and no one shall open. That's an exact quote, isn't it?

So what was going on? And you can read Isaiah 22 if you want the full story. What was happening then? There was a king by the name of Hezekiah. Kings in those days had what we might call like a chief of staff. It was someone who was given the key to that king's kingdom. With this key came the power to give access. That is, he could allow in whoever he wanted to allow in. He could keep out whoever he wanted to keep out. He had the authority and the access to the king's court because he had the key.

Are you with me so far? Well, this chief of staff that King Hezekiah had proved to be, follow me, unfaithful. And so a new leader, a new servant came on the scene. Elakim. Elakim is given now the key and he is a true, a faithful servant to the king who now had the authority and access into the king's court. That's exactly what these readers would have understood. So what is Jesus saying here? He's saying, I'm the true one. I'm the faithful one. He was a foreshadowing of me. I am the one that has the authority to grant access to the presence of God. Now the implications of that are huge, aren't they?

How many of you have ever like tried to open a door with the wrong key? Not necessarily on purpose, but like you stood outside your apartment or your door at home, like fiddling through all the keys, trying to find the right one, or you've been at a hotel and you've like, you know, done that electronic key over and over and over again and it keeps coming back red. You know this, every key may open a door, but only the right key opens the right door. Are you with me? In other words, right access depends on having the right key. So this is awesome. What is Jesus declaring when he says, I am the one that has the key of David? As simple as I can say it, no one has access to God except through Jesus Christ. That's a great place for an amen. All right. I'm about to come out and kick y'all. Lakeville, amen. I heard him. I don't know about Burnsville. All right. There is no way you can have access to God, but through Jesus, he's the one that holds the key. Now the gospel implications of this are incredible, right? We get fired up about the gospel. Are you ready to be encouraged? Right. Here's the gospel. Because of our sin, we are excluded. We are separated from God.

[11 : 38] Now you can try your own key, a key of good works, a key of church tradition, key of whatever it may be, but it's not going to get you in. You are in a very real sense excluded, but Jesus takes the key of the cross. That is God comes in the flesh. He dies on the cross for our sins.

And because of that, Jesus has opened the door. Or if you want to use like Hebrew language, the veil has been torn, which means what? You have access to God. Get fired up about that. All right.

Like you were excluded. You couldn't come in because of your sin, but Jesus, because of the cross, has opened the door to access to God. And you say, well, how do I know that it won't shut? Well, Jesus has put the cross there to hold the door open. And you say, but how do I know that that's enough? Because Jesus rose from the grave. Ain't nobody got the power to shut it.

If you're here today, if you're in Lakeville today, and you don't have a relationship with God, are you listening? Walk through that door. The door is wide open. He has opened it for you to have a relationship with God because of what Christ has done. This is the gospel. You were excluded, but you have now been invited in. That's the best news in all the world. Let me just say it again.

You have access to God. That is what Jesus is saying in this introduction. Now, why does it matter to Philadelphia? Oh, are you encouraged yet? Sermon ain't over, right? Why would this matter to the Church of Philadelphia? Well, here's what we know about the Church of Philadelphia. In fact, I don't have time to show you all this, but if you've been following along with this series, you probably recognize some familiar language from this letter to the letter in Smyrna. You see, the Church of Philadelphia lived in a city that had a large Jewish population, meaning that what was a vibrant part of the activity in that city was temple worship. Do you know what would happen to a Jewish person who converted to Christianity in those days? They were in a very real way excluded. Much like those men I saw in Greece excluded from their families, excluded from their families, excluded from their community, outcasts. And more than all of that, they were excluded from the temple. The temple door in a very real way was slammed in their face. You are not allowed in here anymore, you Christ follower.

[14:57] They were trying to say, you no longer have access to God. It was in many ways, like in the 11th century, when the Pope and the King collide. Pope Gregory VII and King Henry IV clash over who has the authority to appoint bishops. The Pope said the Church did. The King said, no, no, no, the state does, and they collide.

The Pope announces what is called an interdiction, meaning the King is no longer allowed to have communion or the Eucharist. He cannot participate in that. Well, in Catholic theology, certainly then, if you were cut off from the table, you were cut off from God. No access to communion, no access to God.

In other words, the Pope was trying to deliver this message. You may be able to kill me, but I can send you to hell. I can cut you off from God. And so terrified was the King that he literally got on his knees. Think of this. The King got on his knees in the snow begging the Pope for forgiveness.

Can I give you some great news this morning? Are you ready to be encouraged? Why is Jesus introducing himself this way to the church at Philadelphia? Here is the point in the introduction.

They may have shut you out of the temple, but I have let you into the kingdom. Christian, you may be a lot of things. Excluded is not one of them. You have been given access to God, and no matter what door has been slammed in your face, the door into the kingdom, the door into abundant life is wide open for you. That's good news. You're like, but I really want to be in that club.

[17:02] I really want to be accepted by those friends. Hello, you're accepted by God. You don't need all of that. You have all the acceptance you could possibly want. Listen to Hebrews chapter 10, verse 19. I know some of you are thinking he's still on the first verse.

This is going to take forever. Maybe it will. Verse 19, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he's opened for us through the curtain that is through his flesh, since we have a great priest over the house of God, all the beauty, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith.

Christian, here's my encouragement to you so far. No matter what door has been closed in your life, Jesus has opened the door of abundant life. Just let it sink in. No matter what door has been slammed in your life, Jesus has opened the door of abundant life. That's good news.

The good news isn't over yet. Now look at the evaluation. Verse 8, I know your work. So there's our phrase that keys us into the evaluation. Behold, I've set before you an open door. Again, that's not an open door to ministry. That's open door to access to God, 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. Jesus doesn't say anything negative to the church at Philadelphia. It's all encouragement. And what he says is this, you may be small in power, but you are mighty in faithfulness.

You may be small in power, you're mighty in faithfulness. Listen, if you've zoned out, zoned back in for this, because see, here's what's going to happen when you feel excluded, when you feel rejected, when you're suffering, when you're going through trials and tribulations.

[18 : 46] Here's how you're going to feel. Are you ready? I don't matter. I've been divorced. I don't have the talents that other people have. I can't be used in any significant way. You see, when you feel the door slammed on your face, you begin to be fed lies that you're just not significant at all.

You just don't fit in. You just don't matter. Jesus is encouraging this church that feels that way with this. You may not look like much, but I can use you for much. Be faithful. Be faithful.

If you're here today and you feel like you don't matter, listen to Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 1, verse 26. Consider your calling, brothers. Not many of you are wise according to worldly standards.

Not many are powerful. Not many of noble birth. But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise. He chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong. We are, after all, followers of Jesus, aren't we? He didn't look like much, did He? Born in a manger. Followers were fishermen.

Died on a cross. Are you kidding? How humiliating and rejecting is that? And yet, through His faithfulness, He has changed our lives and this world forever. You look at me right here. You may feel insignificant, but you are not. Because you're His.

[20 : 24] Now, through their suffering, Jesus is going to encourage them in two ways in the next two verses. I know you're suffering, but I know you feel insignificant, but I want you to know that I am going to use you. 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. Again, this letter has its background in Isaiah. I don't want to get too technical here.

I want to stay to kind of the main point of the verse. But listen to Isaiah chapter 60 and verse 14 for just the background of this. And tell me that you don't see the context here.

The sons of those who afflicted you shall come bending low to you, and all who despised you, rejection, exclusion, shall bow down at your feet. They shall call you the city of the Lord, the Zion of the Holy One of Israel. Again, there's a lot here. I just don't have time to unpack. Here's the main point. Back in Isaiah, God is saying, Israel, I am going to use you to reach and to minister to your oppressors, the Gentiles. Jesus then takes that and applies it to this situation, that is, believing Jews who are true Jews, because being a true part of the people of God was always a matter of faith, right? It's about faith in Jesus Christ. I'm going to use you even to your oppressors, those that have shut you out, those that have rejected you, and I will use you to reach them.

Here is the point stated simply. God will use your suffering for someone else's salvation. So when you're feeling rejected, when you're feeling excluded, when you're going through all these trials, you need to understand that that is one of the ways you do evangelism, because it's in your suffering that the unbelieving world looks at you and says, wait a minute, that hope in Jesus actually works. You have to see your storm as your mission field and know, as insignificant as you may feel, God is using you in your suffering to reach your enemies.

[22 : 52] That's really, really encouraging when you're hurting. But notice the second thing that Jesus says is not just that God will use you, but God's going to keep you. Verse 10, because you have kept my word about patient endurance, notice this, I will keep you from the hour of trial that is coming on the whole world to try those who dwell on the earth. So here's the flow of the text. You've been rejected, but I have accepted you. I have opened the door and let you in.

And I know because of your rejection, you feel insignificant, but you are mighty in faithfulness. Because of that, I'm going to use you in your suffering to reach others. And in your suffering, you can write this down. I will never let you go. Your suffering will not defeat you. I will protect you even in the trials of life. Now, there are some people, hear me on this, I greatly respect and deeply love that interpret this verse to mean the rapture. That is the phrase that I will keep you from the hour of trial, right? That is that they're going to be raptured before the tribulation. How many of y'all have ever heard that? Okay. Now, regardless of what you believe on the rapture, I'm not here to debate that with you this morning. What I am saying is that this verse can't mean that.

I've heard people try to use this verse to teach that, but it won't work. And here's why. Are you ready? This is really deep, so I'm glad you're sitting down. Do you know why it can't be the rapture?

Because they weren't raptured. Everybody that I know that holds to any view of rapture believes it hasn't happened yet.

Because if it has, why are we here, right? I mean, everybody's on pretty much agreement that the rapture hasn't happened, meaning they weren't raptured. And I'm pretty sure that nobody from the church of Philadelphia is still around. Jesus, if he's encouraging them here with the rapture, lied to them. But it's not what he means at all. In fact, the meaning of this is very easy to see if you'll just take that phrase, I will keep you, and look at the only other time that it is used in Scripture by the same author, John, from the same speaker, Jesus. John chapter 17 and verse 15.

[25 : 25] This is some great, great news. I do not, this is Jesus' prayer, I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you see it, but that you keep them from the evil one. He is not talking about evacuation. He is talking about preservation, like Noah through the flood, like Israel through the sea. Jesus is not saying, I will take you out of tribulation. He's saying, I will protect you in tribulation. Whatever your view on the rapture is, that is not what I'm concerned about at this moment. Here's what I'm concerned about. The person here today who is hurting, who is suffering, and this is what you need to know. God won't always take you out, but he will always get you through. Amen?

He won't always take you out of the situation, but he's not going to let you go. He is going to protect you every step of the way, because you are his. Are you encouraged yet? Listen, I'm doing my job, all right? I'm sweating, screaming, yelling, preaching, all right? Man, I know you feel excluded.

I know the door's been slammed in your face, but here's what I want you to know. You're in. You have access. Run through the work of Christ into the presence of God, and I know because of your rejection you feel insignificant, but you're not. You're mighty. I can do great things through you, and I will use your suffering for ministry. And not only that, every step of the way, I got you.

Brother, sister, I got you. I will keep you. Not letting you go. You're a lot of things, but excluded's not one of them. So what do we do? What do we do with this? Look at verse 11. Here's the application. I am coming soon. Hold fast what you have so that no one may seize your crown. That phrase, hold fast what you have, it means literally hold your position, or I like this, hold your gaze.

Hold your position or hold your gaze. You see, here's the other thing. If you've zoned out, zone back in. When you feel rejected and you feel excluded, you tend to get lost in the fog of suffering. Anybody ever been there? Anybody there today? Like there's so much going on in your life.

[28 : 15] You can't make heads for tails. Your emotions are telling you one thing. The advice of others is telling you something different that may not even be godly. Think, for instance, Job's friends.

You've got all this stuff coming at you. When you're in the midst of the trial, when the door's been slammed on your face, it's very, very easy to lose focus. In the midst of all these promises, what Jesus is saying, here's what I want you to do, Christian. Hold your gaze.

Do not let your emotions tell you something that is not grounded in the truth of God. Hold your gaze. Hold fast what you know. So get this imagery like a soldier in battle.

like a worker atop a skyscraper that's focused on every step. An artist working on a painting that is focused on every brush. A carpenter that is focused on every single cut. What you need to do in the fog of your suffering is live with a focused gaze on the gospel of Jesus Christ. Don't let your focus, don't let your suffering take your focus away from truth. I've shared with you before, Lindsay Jacob Ellis, very well-known snowboarder in the Olympics. You remember the time that she had the gold medal wrapped up. It was hers. She had started out the race and was in this enormous lead. It was all hers and she falls. By the time that she can get up, she has passed and she will end up getting the silver medal and losing the gold. It was right there and she took her attention off. And to her parents, to her coaches, to her coaches, and even to Lindsay herself, she was absolutely devastated. In fact, when she was interviewed afterwards, she just said, I simply took my focus off what I was doing. My goodness, we have something greater than a gold medal. Amen? We have a crown of glory. Don't let suffering take your gaze off of that.

Brother, sister, are you hurting today? Are you suffering? Are you in the midst of trials? Stay focused on the truth you have in Jesus. The letter ends with some other great news. Are you encouraged yet? You better be, right? I don't know what else to do if you're not, right? Look at this final bit of encouragement from verses 12 and 13. The one who conquers, I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God. Never shall he go out of it. I will write on him the name of my God, the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which comes down from my God out of heaven, and my own new name. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. One more thing you need to know about Philadelphia, and then we'll wrap it up. Philadelphia was known for earthquakes. In fact, think San Francisco, and that is very much the kind of context you would have in Philadelphia. In fact, it wasn't that long before the writing of this letter, around 17 AD, there was a major earthquake that had devastated the city of Philadelphia.

[32 : 01] In other words, the context or the environment of this city was one of great instability. People were always fearful. In fact, the imagery of no more will you have to run out, that's the imagery of when an earthquake would come, you would run out of your home because you didn't want it to like cave in on you and kill you. And Jesus is saying in the midst of instability, I'm going to give you security and stability in this promise. And here it is. Here's what he's saying. You have a life of security because you have a new identity. You have a life of security because you have a new identity. That is, you're secure. You're a permanent fixture in the temple of God. You're a pillar, right? There's no earthquake that's going to be able to tear that down. You're in. You're a part of my people. And you're a part of that. You're a permanent fixture because you have my name. You have been given a new name. You're a part of a new people. And you're awaiting a new creation, new Jerusalem that will come down out of the sky. You know, one of the things as a pastor that I get kind of the front row seat of is oftentimes at a wedding, seeing a bride sign for the first time her new name.

And it never fails. What she will often say is this, that just feels weird. Not in a bad way, it just kind of a, like I'm not used to that name. I'm not used to writing that name, right? But before long, it becomes very, very normal. Will you hear this this morning, Christian? Do you want hope in this life? Do you want hope in your suffering? Do you want encouragement in the midst of your trial? Here it is. Get used to your new name. You are His. And no one is taking that away. No one is shutting that door on you. You, in a world of instability, have a security in Jesus Christ.

So here's the summary of the whole letter. You're getting used to this by now. Here is the sermon could have been a lot shorter paragraph. And I love you so much this week, I'm actually putting it on the screen. So here's the whole letter. And tell me that this is an awesome news. If you don't leave in courage, this is it. Here it is. Do you feel excluded in life? Well, Jesus is the one who gives access to abundant life and no one can shut that door on you. So keep focus on faithfulness, knowing that God will use you and God will keep you because you are forever His. Amen? That's God's word to you, to the church at Philadelphia and to us at Berean. A word of encouragement.

Faith family, access to God has been given. Access to God has been given. How do I know access to God has been given? Here's how I know it. Because on the cross, God slammed the door of sin on Jesus so that He could open the door of grace to you. And so today, if you feel in a very real way excluded, before you stands an open door. And all God's people said, Amen. Let's pray together.