

To the Philadelphians

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[0 : 0 0] Well, tonight for a short time, let's turn to Revelation chapter 3, looking at verses 7 to 13. This one letter to the church in Philadelphia, along with the other six letters which were written to these churches at the time of John's ministry.

The seven churches were, in fact, of course, seven historical churches where people worshipped in the time that John was given to write this book of the Revelation.

They were situated fairly close to each other in what we would now regard as western Turkey, that western part of Turkey. If you look at a map of Turkey and see the part of it that's further west towards ourselves, it was within that region that these churches were situated, all the ones that are mentioned there.

And although they're actually individual churches that were written to and they were actual churches at the time, they also, because of the fact that they comprise seven churches, it appears that we should think of what is written there to them.

And they were certainly written to in regard to their own context, their own needs specifically at that time, each of these churches. But when you look at it in its entirety, it is something that remains in place as instruction from the Lord of the church right through to the end of time.

[1 : 4 0] In other words, if you take the seven to be the number of completeness, as it often is in the Bible, then what you really have here is a set of instructions that are taking account of different circumstances that these churches were in and have been repeated down through the process of history.

And these instructions can then be applied to the church in every generation, wherever such things are found in the context of those who worship and serve the Lord.

We could say, in fact, that each of these letters could be said to have a key word, if you can pick up the main points that are given there for each of the letters, or out of each of the letters to these churches.

You would have something like the first one there to the church in Ephesus. The key word there would be love. The key word in the next one would be suffering, because it's all about the suffering of the church in Smyrna.

And then you would have, for the third one, truth, the church in Pergamum. The church in Thyatira, the key word there would be holiness. The church in Sardis then would probably be marked by the key word of life.

[3 : 0 2] The one we're looking at tonight, Philadelphia, has to do with opportunity, the open door. And the final one, Laodicea, the lukewarm church, the key word there would be recovery or repentance.

That's just one way of looking at it and trying to see the pattern of the teaching that the Lord sent to these churches. Philadelphia, as we said, was situated along with the other churches in this part of the world.

And what you'll find through most, if not all, of these letters are features, even of the geographical terrain and things like that, that characterize that area, such as for Laodicea, they had to pump water in from places like Philadelphia and other towns around, because the water in Laodicea itself naturally came from springs and tended to be warm all the time.

And that's why what he's saying there to the church in Laodicea features that emphasis on the kind of water they were used to naturally and how it fits as a description for what they are spiritually.

It's neither hot nor cold, it's lukewarm. And you'll find the same here with the church in Philadelphia, I will mention as we go through the study, why he says in verse 12, to the one who conquers, I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God.

[4 : 32] Because one of the things that characterized this area and still does, as you know, in Turkey and parts of that, that part of the world are earthquakes and movements in the earth.

And we'll see how that is relevant when he comes to speak about making them a temple in the pillar of my God. Three things really briefly. First of all, here is a church under the stewardship of Jesus.

They all are, of course, under the stewardship of Jesus, under the lordship of Jesus, which is how the book really begins. And that carries on into the rest of Revelation.

You're always aware, going through the book of Revelation, even the very difficult passages that are so difficult to understand. But even there, the fact of Christ's lordship and total dominance of what's happening is one of the features that comes through strongly.

So the church, first of all, here is a church under the stewardship of Jesus because it mentions specifically that he has certain keys. And keys are given to a steward over a household, or would have been the case in those days, by which they would be able to open and close doors.

[5 : 43] That's the first thing. Second thing is, here's a church engaged in the service of Jesus. I know your works. I have set before you an open door. And all the way down through these verses, right down as far as verse 11, you find a description there of a church in the service of Jesus.

And finally, this promise, which is similar to the promises that close each of the letters, to the one who overcomes or to the one who conquers. And here, there's an assurance of future security in Jesus or by Jesus.

It's given this assurance of future security. A church under his stewardship, a church engaged in his service, and an assurance given to individuals that they are secure in him.

I am, he says here, 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.

He describes himself, or Jesus is described as the Holy One, the True One. And obviously that fits in with much else in Revelation and the Bible, that Christ is presented to us as one who is both holy and true, and therefore utterly reliable.

[7 : 05] And when you come to look at his stewardship, as we'll see now, this key that has been given to him, it's important that it is as the one who is true, the one who is himself reliable, the one who is holy, that he uses this key.

Now what does it mean that he has this key? What does the key signify? There's a passage in Isaiah, very similar to that in the days of Hezekiah.

In Isaiah chapter 22, you'll find a description there of the steward under King Hezekiah Hezekiah at the crisis that came during his reign.

And what you'll find there in chapter 22 and verse 19 is very similar to what's said here. And it says, He says, And obviously that brings us to a picture of Jesus himself as he's portrayed in terms of stewardship by what that steward was in Hezekiah's time.

The details of what a steward did and the role that a steward had in a household in the Old Testament was very, very important.

[8 : 53] They were given keys because they had to, first of all, of course, prove to be trustworthy. And as trustworthy, they were given keys by which to lock and unlock cupboards and doors and stores that belonged to the master of the place, to the person in charge of the whole family and the household.

And these stewards were, in fact, given such an important role, a role in which they were trusted, that they would not steal, that they would not actually open inappropriately, all sorts of things, that big responsibility.

And here is Jesus spoken of as one who has the key of David. Now, David, of course, is one of whom it is said that he would have a son who would occupy his throne and whose reign would last forever.

And that, of course, is Christ himself. And all the way through, the prophecies regarding David, you find emphasis on his kingship, on his throne, on his kingdom, on his dominance, on his rule.

And all of that is really a picture for us of Christ himself. And when you look at the New Testament emphasis in Ephesians 1, verse 22, you can begin there, where you find that Christ has been exalted by the Lord, by God himself.

[10 : 20] Where you find that that exaltation is something that includes him being made head over all things to his church, as it says in that context. Matthew 28, verse 18, Jesus saying, Unto me has been given all authority in heaven and on earth.

Hebrews chapter 3, verse 6, Jesus as the Son who is faithful over the house of God. Moses was faithful in it, Jesus is faithful over it.

Jesus is superior to Moses because he is the steward of the whole house. He is the one who presides over everything that needs to be done past, present, and future of the house of God, of the kingdom of God.

So all of that tells you something that helps you understand what this phrase means. This is the words of the Holy One, the True One, who has the key of David, who opens and no one will shut, and who shuts and no one opens.

Every event that takes place in the history of the world that has taken place, that's taking place now, that will take place in the future. Remember, he's been made head over all things for his church or to his church.

[11 : 38] Who unlocks all of these doors in history? Who unlocks the door that ushers in a new empire or a new government or a change in nations?

Who opens new doors in the experience of individuals, of congregations? Who is it that closes doors as much as opens them when he himself chooses to close them?

It is this Lord. It is the one who is holy and true, who has the key of David, who holds them in his hand. and who even has, as Revelation says elsewhere, even the key of death itself.

They are at his belt. He holds them constantly. It's a picture given to us of the absolute authority and supremacy of Jesus Christ over all of human life.

and for all that millions don't believe in him and some don't believe that he even existed and some who believe that he did exist don't believe that he exists now.

[12 : 51] And yet here we are tonight here in this building looking at this passage and being persuaded that God is assuring us that by his side he has the steward of his kingdom and that the steward of his kingdom is no less the person than the one who died and rose again and is exalted to glory and has the key of David.

The kingdom is in his hand. He has earned it. It's been given to him by rights and he's come into the possession of these keys.

We have to be aware of that fact in our own lives. Jesus is the one who opens all the events of life who leaves them open as long as he himself wants to have it open and who closes them when they need to be closed.

When you think of your life as going through a series of rooms think of yourself going through a great house one of these great houses in our own kingdom that's open to the public to go and see whether it's owned wherever it is when you go into it you're following a certain route through it you go through very different rooms you come to drawing rooms and dining rooms and lounges and small rooms and bedrooms and changing rooms all kinds of rooms very different as you go from one to the that's life that's what life is like and it is Jesus who opens one and brings you through the door and into it for as long as that will be the experience of your life the events of your life that's where you will be that's where you'll be learning that's where your discipleship is situated then when it comes for him to move you on he opens another door and he closes the one to that woman brings you another one and so it goes on through life friends he has the key of

David he has the key to providence he has the key to our lives and we can as we said this morning we can wait with confidence upon him knowing that he will always be true and always be holy and always be faithful and always the dependable one it doesn't matter when he closes a door and is going to open another one you can be just as sure of him as he takes you into the new room as you were when you were with him in the old one that's what he's like that's who he is he has the key of David and he opens and no one shuts and shuts and no one opens and that brings us to the second point a church engaged in the service of Jesus I know your works behold I have set before you an open door which follows on of course from what he says about having the key to open and to shut here he is saying

[16 : 09] I have set before you an open door I opened this door for you my people in Philadelphia it's there for you I've opened it for you it's there for you to go through and when you ask what is that door there are 8 to 9 he speaks about God having opened a door for him in Corinth for the gospel and that's really largely how the New Testament uses this kind of terminology this kind of language when it speaks about an open door it's a door for the gospel it's a door of opportunity it's a door for service it's a door for further service for the Lord and what he's saying to despite all the pagan influences in the city of Philadelphia I have set before you an open door that's important to these

Philadelphians they're finding it hard he's commending them for having stood for having not given in for not for having not denied his name because obviously they've been under pressure to do that the cult of the emperor is all around them there's all kinds of pressure to bow to the emperor as to a god but they've not done that and he's saying I have set before you an open door now when Jesus sets before us an open door he's opening it for us to go through he's not opening it so that we will look into that next room and admire it but stay where we are and what Jesus in the gospel tonight is setting before you an open door a door that leads you into life if you've never gone into that room before he's opening it up for you so that you will go through it so that you will come into it and experience that life that he has to give you within that room that's crammed full of so many treasures don't admire them from outside don't actually just stuff your head full of knowledge of what's in that room but stay outside and realize that the door is open for you to go through and for serving the

Lord as Christians we are in a position of great advantage despite the fact just like the Philadelphians that there are all kinds of pressures and influences around us that oppose the gospel it's so so important that the Lord is saying to us tonight as he said to these Philadelphians I have set before you an open door until that door closes it's to serve the Lord that he's keeping it open for us go through that door make sure that you're making progress in the gospel service by using the door that Jesus has opened this congregation has many qualities there are many activities associated with the gospel alongside the preaching of the word and the formal worship of God and in all of that we're trying to take advantage and have done and sought to take advantage of this open door that

Jesus has left us for the gospel maybe that door will close one day just think of that because remember that as the Lord who has the key of David and opens and no one can shut he also says I'm the one who shuts and no one will open it there are no churches now in this area of Turkey as far as I'm aware there are groups of believers here and there yes but these churches are long gone Ephesus was warned by Christ that unless they repented and got rid of these false teachings and practices that they had then he would actually come and remove the lampstand from its place unless you repent and that's what happened Jesus is no longer worshipped in these churches they have gone sometimes you may find part of their ruins but some of them you can't even know where the church where the buildings once stood and we don't want that to happen in our particular circumstance which is why the

Lord's appeal must always be kept in mind I have set before you an open door if we don't make advantage of that and serve the Lord in our time then it's likely we'll find that this door will shut and the Lord will move on to somewhere else and remember that when Jesus opens this door it will remain open as long as he chooses to as long as you serve him this door will be open and it's for serving him that it remains open tonight and then he says you have a little power only a little power and yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name they're obviously not very strong in fact he says they're actually quite weak and despite the fact that they're weak nevertheless he's commending them for having kept his word and not denied his name and you know that's something we perhaps think of as a disadvantage that we're not very strong spiritually or morally or temperamentally in ourselves actually that's an advantage to the gospel if we use it properly you'll find all the way through in

[22 : 30] Paul's letters that he did not see the weakness that was his in himself or any weakness belonging to himself naturally as a barrier to Christ in the gospel in fact he says it's an advantage to me and it's an advantage to the gospel because I will glory in my infirmities and I will boast in my weakness why so that the power of Christ may rest upon me for when I am weak then I am strong and if we present our weakness to Jesus then he will show his power as he said as Paul said again to the Corinthians we are cracked vessels jars of clay we have this treasure this treasure of the gospel this treasure of salvation indeed in personal terms it's located in jars of clay what we are ourselves so that the excellency of the power might be of

God and not of us what's the reason that we endure that we keep going what's the reason despite all the cracks in our weak lives that we don't give in that we don't capitulate that we still want to serve the Lord despite what the world around says us what's the secret of that how do we keep going it's the power of Christ resting upon us we present our weakness we say Lord give us your strength and it's by his strength that things are achieved not by ours not to do with human ability it's not to do with any gifts that people may have naturally it's not to do with individuals whether they're ministers or elders or missionaries or whatever yes of course God gifts people and gives them gifts specific to whatever task he sends them out to but at the end of the day it's not by might and it's not by power but by my spirit says the

Lord that's what he's saying and emphasizing here for us well yes they're weak but you have just a little power but yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name you see it's not it's not the world would define these things that we need but faithfulness to himself that's what this church where it's the only one of these seven letters in which there's no word of rebuke or reproof all the others have something that Jesus picks out some of them quite a number of things in which he is critical of how they're going about things of how they're living but this one isn't it's commending them despite the fact that they're weak they've not denied his name they've kept going they've endured they're persevering they're pressing on that's why he's emphasizing this door is still open for you for all your weakness take advantage of it and then he's saying

I will when it's going on we're skipping over quite a number of things really in a sense but behold he says 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 well nobody uses strong words like the Lord does because here were people he calls here Jews they were obviously of the Jewish people or certainly you could say that they were passing themselves off as belonging properly to God's true church and yet God is saying or Jesus through John is saying to them that these people who are saying they are Jews or are not actually belong to the synagogue of Satan because when you pass yourself off as a Christian and act like the world and act especially in opposition to the gospel and opposition to the church of the gospel then you're an agent of Satan and what he's saying here is they are of the synagogue of the gatherings together of

Satan instead of being a gathered church and the word church means essentially a gathering of people people assembling together having been called by the grace of God here he is saying there are people who say that's what they are and I'm telling you they're a synagogue of Satan because they were opposing the gospel as God had given it to his people they were making life really difficult for these through faithful believers in Philadelphia whatever we must be we must be honest and transparent and sincere in our following of Christ because the world will see through it if we're not and far more importantly God sees it instantly now he's saying I will make them come and bow down before your feet and they will learn that I have loved you there's different ways of taking that but if you go again to the

[28 : 15] Old Testament way of this kind of language and the likes of Isaiah chapter 60 verse 14 it generally meant in those days looking forward to the reign of Christ the coming of Christ it generally meant the intake of the Gentiles into the church in terms of their salvation their incorporation into the believing people of God and therefore it could well be that we should see this as an indication of people coming to bow down before the feet of this church if you like of these believing people in Philadelphia but doing so out of yielding their lives over to Christ yielding their lives over to his lordship to his stewardship to be ruled by him and that's what you want to see isn't it nothing would shake up the world of atheism and humanism tonight like the conversion of someone like Richard Dawkins are we praying for that are we setting that before God as something to earnestly pray about because it would really bring tremendous tremors into that world of unbelief and atheism even if they wouldn't last all that long but still be assured that it would be a tremendous thing that would be noticed just think of how it was with Saul of

Tarsus think of the way that news about his change in life and his conversion had gone through all of these churches that heard about this great event and this man who was wreaking havoc in the church and causing people to be put to death and put into prison now is preaching the gospel which once he despised it shook up the opposition that was led by Saul of Tarsus they just didn't know what to make of this except that they knew something really powerful and dramatic must have done it and perhaps what he was now saying about Jesus and the resurrection was the key to it all I will make them to come and bow down before your feet and they will learn that I have loved you well you know that's one of the things that really strikes us as we come to be incorporated into the church of

God into the believing people of God isn't it you come to be aware almost immediately not only that hopefully these people that have come to join are people who love me and welcome me and are warm towards me of course that's what we want to be but this is also true these are people loved by the Lord these are people whom Jesus loves they have the love of Jesus about them and that's what we want to pray for too that people from outside who are tonight before their televisions or engaged in whatever worldly activity they're engaged in no interest in being in church no interest in the gospel as this open door is availed of by yourselves and as you seek to keep reaching out to such people this is what you want to see you want to see those people who are presently in opposition to the gospel coming to bow down before the feet of the church because in the church not for the church's own sake but because that in that church this Lord of the gospel is found and is exercising his authority and ultimately what they're doing is capitulating to this Lord and they're coming to realize as they've never realized before this wonder and this amazing quality of the love of Christ the love of Christ they will come to know they will learn that I have loved you and that's something also to pray for as we work for the Lord as we are engaged in the service of

Jesus that people will be turned around in their lives and will come to realize that yes you are right the love of Jesus is what you share and what you enjoy and I want to share it to you that's what we really surely had burdened and concerned to see and then he says 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 will seize your crown well very briefly he's talking there about the final judgment the judgment that will come upon the whole world to try those who dwell on the earth he's saying because you have kept my word I will keep you from that hour of trial or in that hour of trial all who have come to trust in the

Lord will be kept when he comes to judge the earth when he comes to give as he says earlier those who actually have whatever they have done he will actually deal with them accordingly and you and I will be there you and I will be participants in that judgment will we be kept will we be safe will we know him as our refuge will be like will we be like others in this very book of revelation of whom it is said that when this great event took place the sky vanished like a scroll and the kings of the earth and the great ones and the generals and the rich and powerful and everyone slave and free hid themselves in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains calling on the mountains and the rocks follow us and hide us from the face of him who is seated on the throne and from the wrath of the lamb for the great day of his wrath has come and who can stand who can stand well they can they will stand those that are his those that are safe in them those who have accepted him those who have lived their lives in obedience to him those who have bowed down to his lordship they will be kept when this hour comes to try those who dwell on the earth so he says meantime hold fast what you have so that no one may seize your crown be diligent be vigilant keep on holding to the things that are precious in the life that he's given you in the gospel that he's given you so that no one will take your crown and finally he gives an assurance of future security now you notice the change there at verse 12 up to now he's been talking to the church now he addresses as he does in all the letters to the one who conquers he's now coming to address the individual and apply it to every individual believer 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 the name of the city of my

[36 : 16] God the new Jerusalem which comes down from God my God out of heaven and my own new name the shift to the individual is important he's talking to me and he's talking to you through the gospel he's not leaving it at a generality he's not just saying my word is to you their church he comes to say now to the one who overcomes to the one who conquers by me I promise that this will be what I will give them and he tells them I will make them a pillar in the temple of my God now a pillar of course in the temple is such a massive structure and it's designed to actually hold up just like these pillars there just now as you look at them they have a specific purpose they're not just there to look good or to be painted nice colors or whatever they are there to actually support the structure and if you knock down these pillars the whole thing will come tumbling down and they were very well used and used in Philadelphia to structures coming tumbling down as they still are on this part of the world in Turkey and around about that because as we said it was prone to earthquakes and what he's saying here uses that tendency that thing that they were so used to and he says but I will make this one who conquers a pillar in the temple of my God never shall he go out of it and I will write on him never shall it be destroyed it will always remain standing it will stand the shock of judgment everything I'll make him a pillar in the temple of my

God the spiritual temple that God is building for himself and I will write on him the name of my God that means ownership and the new Jerusalem that means citizenship they belong as citizens to this city of heaven they are owned by God they are his possession his prized possession and then he says and I will write on him also my own new name what is that what new name is meant when it says the name Jesus says my new name well it hasn't been revealed yet if you go to chapter 19 and verse 12 just let's finish with that reference chapter 19 and verse 12 here is a picture as well of the one the white horse the one sitting on it is called faithful and true so like the description we've been seeing in this letter and in righteousness he judges and makes war his eyes are like a flame of fire and on his head are many diadems and he has a name written that no one knows but himself you see John is being told here are things that will come to pass right up to and including the time of judgment but there are still some things that you cannot possibly comprehend while you're in this life and

Jesus has kept this to himself his new name which will be revealed when he comes but what he's assuring of is that his own people whatever that new name actually is will have that name written upon them they will be like him they will participate in his victory they will carry his new name as those who have conquered in him and by him this letter under the stewardship of Jesus to this church under the stewardship of Jesus to a church engaged in the service of Jesus to individuals given an assurance of future security by Jesus may we then be that kind of church and may we also be that kind of individual let's pray we give thanks O Lord this evening for your gospel a gospel that you used to bring your people together to form your church in this world a fellowship of people in whom you dwell and a fellowship in in whose midst we find that work of grace and sanctification and preparation for your coming we thank you for your lordship over your church for its perfection for the way in which you exercise that stewardship in which you have such authority to open and to close and we pray that we may in accepting it O Lord ever come daily to yield ourselves to you so your lordship will also be gladly received by us personally we thank you for all that you bring to us in your word in anticipation of your coming we pray that you would enable us Lord to feel that sense of excitement in our hope when we think of that new name that your people will actually have applied to them the new name that belongs to their Lord himself here is now we pray for Jesus sake amen you