

# Philadelphia: The City Of The Open Door

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Preacher: Harry Robinson

[ 0 : 00 ] I've had trouble with this besties this week, and I'm going to share my... And I'm going to... This is impossible.

There we are. All right, this will work. I hate myself for doing stupid things like that, but I... I'm sure it's forgivable. What we're looking at today is the city of Philadelphia, and it's one of the seven churches.

And it really is. I mean, I'm quite serious about the Salvador Dali painting. It's a... There's so much compacted into it that it's very difficult to...

To sort it all out and to try and make sense of it. The... I guess the thing that you could say about it, if...

[ 1 : 10 ] If you were to try, is this, you see, that it's... Do you know what that represents? I'm not sure that it does very well, but it's an open door as opposed to a closed door.

And... And I guess the open door is really the theme that you should focus on in trying to think about it.

What I... Here we go. What I'd like to lay on you particularly today as a kind of way of thinking about this passage is the real sort of adventure of the years in which you have lived in British Columbia is that this place must be the pinnacle of the adventure which this century has indulged in of attempting to live without God.

You know, the idea has been around for a long time, but people have been too poor to really give it a whirl. The...

With a lot of sick people, a lot of political problems, a lot of social unrest and so on, we haven't really had the opportunity that we in British Columbia in this generation have had to experiment with the possibility that the trouble with our world is God.

[ 2 : 53 ] You know, if we could get rid of that concept, then man would come to his full destiny and his full maturity.

You will remember that, you know, much of the inspiration behind cutting off heads with the guillotine in the French Revolution was to get rid of the aristocracy and the wealthy and the church who had foisted this God concept on the poor people and therefore had kept them down and they were to keep down in order that they would show proper respect for the wealthy, the aristocracy, the church, and God in that order.

You know, that they would ascend in their aspirations. So, somebody made the discovery that God was just a conspiracy of the church, the wealthy, and the aristocracy and initiated the great adventure as to how we're going to get along without him.

Too long we have been kept from relying, from realizing our full potential as persons. We must take responsibility into our own hands.

We must build our own cities. Manage our own environment. We must do our work with our minds, producing the technologies so that our bodies are free for enjoyment and relaxation.

[ 4 : 34 ] We must recognize no barriers. We must gather vast amounts of money to achieve all the stupendous goals which occur to the heart and imagination of people.

We must build cities where music and art, places of entertainment, exquisite imported foods... Do you remember when they first developed jet planes, there was this...

Anybody who used to read the Star Weekly comics in those days will remember that there was one fabulous restaurant portrayed in the comics where you went in and you ordered crabs from New Brunswick, and while you lingered over your drink, a jet plane went to New Brunswick, got the crabs and brought them back and they were served to you when you finished your drink.

You see, they had that sort of exquisite kind of dining which is the mark of civilization having reached its pinnacle. Well, that kind of enormous...

I mean, it's enormously costly. It's something that couldn't be done except by a very wealthy society. I read one of the books that Tom referred to, written by Michael Cassidy this past week.

[ 5 : 56 ] It's a very disturbing book if you live in British Columbia. I mean, they really have had their nose ground into it and into it and into it. And they have had to say what they believe.

And they've had to find answers. And money couldn't solve the problems. They were far too deep for that. And I found myself almost envying people brought up in South Africa, at least because they're aware of the issues.

And we're not in our society because we've decided that there aren't any issues which we can't exploit by our own endeavor. We create ideologies to justify our behavior.

We need the poor and the aged and the ill to complement our wealth, our youth, and our radiant good health. The world we live in belongs to youth, wealth, and health.

And that God is simply a postulate of the poor to justify their poverty. Or a postulate of the ill to humiliate their suffering.

[ 7 : 11 ] Or a postulate of the losers to help them accept the fact that they have lost. So we dispense with God except as a kind of placebo for the...

a kind of placebo for losers or an ideology for the weak-minded. And that, you know, anybody else cannot be seriously confronted by the necessity of a commitment to God in our society because our society is committed to demonstrating that human potential is in human beings and that referring to God is...

is against all the rules of our society. We create cities, huge megalopolis of 5, 10, or 15 million people surrounded by poverty, hunger, homelessness, sustained by drugs, alcohol, and controlled violence.

And all this is because we are launched on the great adventure of proving that man can deal with the problem and he doesn't have to resort to the God idea.

Well, you know, that's what makes coming here on a Wednesday a kind of silly thing to do because it's counterproductive in terms of where our society is going and the goals it's trying to achieve because we have a different...

[ 9 : 08 ] a different starting point. And I... You see, what... what happens is that God over here is a speculative possibility but here is where life is and here's where I am.

You see, this is... this is the reality and this is the possibility. And the understanding is that the presence of that possibility has blocked this reality from finding its true fulfillment in the development of the potential that belongs to the individual.

And the commitment of a society like ours on the West Coast is to say here's where the future lies. And only for people who need it you can revert to this even though it is in effect quite worthless.

It is a necessary placebo. So, what happens then as a result of this is that you get in the... you get in the New Testament you get the cities you know that there they are.

And... so you know what it is? The... the city is the place where that God has chosen to demonstrate in a kind of microcosm the reality of all that surrounds us right now right here in Vancouver.

[ 10 : 51 ] And God says he wants you to look at that city in order to understand this city. And that's why this is one of the seven portraits of different kinds of cities in which in which we are living out our lives and seeking to find out what what life is all about.

God is and we are his people among whom he wants to demonstrate who he is and what his purpose is.

So that the cities portrayed in the New Testament are the models that reveal to the one who has ears to hear Mel Bryant wanted our eyes open and our hearts open but this passage wants our ears open.

You've got to be able to hear this. That these the stories of these cities are are given to us so that we will see in the past the present and the future the reality of God's purpose and recognize that behind what is past and behind what is present and behind what is future is the reality of God's eternal purpose.

Eternity is not just a projection of the future eternity is a reality which concerns the past and the present and the future so that eternity is present to us now.

[ 12 : 30 ] It's not a projection. And you remember that wonderful book that was written I think by J.B. Phillips that God is our contemporary and the God of the city of Philadelphia is the God of the city of Vancouver.

So that when he when this model is put before us we look at this ancient city of the book of Revelation within an ancient civilization which politically was the Roman Empire it was the province of Asia in the Roman Empire and it was Philadelphia was a city which was marked by an historic relationship between two brothers who demonstrated such brotherly love that the city was named after them and this is the city which it was a frontier city on the frontiers of civilization it was a city that was subject to earthquakes and it was a city to whom one of the letters in the third chapter of the book of the Revelation is addressed and it's addressed to the angel of the city of Philadelphia as though somehow the one who locally represented the power and authority of God is pictured here as the angel of the church of Philadelphia and he is the one to whom the message is given and through whom the message is heard by the church he is the one who takes charge well who is the letter from then and remember it's always the person of the Lord

Jesus Christ is always described somewhat differently in each of the seven letters in this letter he is described as in three ways as the holy one that is he comes from the presence of God and is marked by the character of God he is the true one in it he stands among all the ideologies and myths and lies of our humanity as the one who is true and he is thirdly the one who has the key of David who shuts and no one opens who opens and no one shuts and so that you get this powerful picture of a city threatened by earthquakes and really on the borders of paganism which is able to take it over again and subject to persecution and in the midst of that city there is a church and the function of the church is that it represents in that city an open door you remember if you've read the story of the lion the witch and the wardrobe that the children go up into the old house up into the old wooden wardrobe and as they go into that wardrobe and through that they enter into Narnia the other kingdom and so what this says is that there is another kingdom there is another reality our society has said with respect to God and his kingdom the door is shut that's no longer a possibility we're not going to rely on it we're not going to think about it we're not going to pay any attention to it the door is shut and finished there is no reality there but this church is present in that city as it must be in this city to say the door is still open and you can't shut it and no matter what happens you're not going to be able to shut it there is a little poem written by a contemporary American author whose name I forget who describes hell and he says the thing that makes hell hell is the awareness of all the people in it that the door out of it is open and they can leave anytime they want now that's not heretical

I'm going to go on and explain what he's saying is that what makes it hell is the realization that it is possible to get out of it but that people in themselves are not able to do it and so ultimately it's their choice that they're there and it's their choice that they stay there and that's a sort of graphic poetic representation of one of the great realities a reality which in a sense we've tried to create for ourselves that there is no open door there is no other possibility than me here now that's all there is and the city of Philadelphia is to be held up before us in order to demonstrate to us that there is an open door there is another possibility a door that cannot be shut in the story of the pilgrim's progress you remember there is a Christian is taken into the dungeon of the castle of giant despair and he's taken down and down and down into the dungeon and he's there and he stays there and he worries and he agonizes and despair takes over him and all around on the floor are the bones of those who have died of the despair which now afflicts him then he realizes that on a string around his neck there is a key and all he has to do is open the door and go out and it takes a great courage for him to do that and to a world in despair the Christian gospel is to say that there is an open door there is another possibility there is another far greater reality than anything you have ever known and that reality is made present to us in the person of Jesus

[ 19 : 40 ] Christ well he goes on to say two or three things about the open door he says there is in the city of Philadelphia a people of God now they are referred to as a synagogue of Satan they are referred to as Jews but you know and I know that you can't say the word Jews in our society without having to spend the rest of the day defending what you mean by that and what the implications of it are and I don't think that revelation means to raise that issue the issue it wants to raise is that there are a people of God who claim to be the people of God and who in fact are the synagogue of Satan and who have despised and rejected those among their members who have put their faith in Jesus Christ the truth has come to them as a people of God and they as a people of God have said we

don't want it shut the door don't let them in and the picture that you're given is that there is an open door for that people to recognize that among them is a people whom God has demonstrably loved and for them that is an open door if they can acknowledge it then he talks about an hour of trial that is coming on the whole world everybody is going to be included and this hour of trial is taken to mean the persecution by the

Romans of all those who will not worship the emperor apparently the Jews had arranged that daily on the altar in Jerusalem a sacrifice was made for the emperor of Rome for his safety and well-being and the emperor of Rome heard of this and was very pleased with it for some time until an emperor came along and said they shouldn't do a sacrifice for the emperor of Rome they need to do one to the emperor of Rome you see that sort of subtle shift with which we're all familiar well that was where the hour of trial was going to come from and the open door was the word of patient endurance and that word of patient endurance even in the hour of trial was an open door to know the presence of God in the midst of the trial third thing it talks about is the battle with evil and you remember it's to him who overcomes to him who conquers and I mentioned last week that the song we shall overcome is essentially the song of the churches in the second and third chapter of Revelation that this conquering is not conquering in our own strength by our own wit or in our own wisdom it is conquering in Christ that God alone conquers is unconquered and unconquerable and that therefore even though the hosts of darkness gather round and the powers of evil are there we nevertheless have an open door through the victory that God has won for us in Christ that represents an open door in that situation and so what the church community who have been given entrusted with the gospel of Jesus Christ in a city like Vancouver what our job is is to tell people who are trapped in the city and there's a lot of very sophisticated ways of getting trapped in the city that there is an open door and that that open door is available to people that will take them from the reality of their present situation to a reality which is far beyond their present situation that they will know that in

God is the reality and that their temporary frail little existence finds its fulfillment and its meaning in the God of eternity the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ so that because of the open door the people in the city are distinguished by these things the people in the city who are belong to Jesus Christ bear the name of God they are citizens of the city of God they have access to the temple of God and that that is something which is open to them that is the other possibility so that we living as we do in this society and in this city and in this particular civilization have the responsibility to say the door is not closed to the kingdom of

God to the reality of God's purposes in Christ that door is open and you can go through that door to reconciliation with God that door is the door which opens to you the kingdom of God the city of God the temple of God and the eternal presence of God and that's what you were made for that's what your life is all about and if you want to live in a city where the door is closed to that in order that your potential might be developed then you're in the right place historically in time and space you're very much in the right place but the city of Philadelphia is given to us as a picture to show that in the midst of our culture our civilization our city in the midst of our city which is built in defiance of God there is an open door to the presence of

[ 26 : 48 ] God through the person of Jesus Christ and that's and that's the door that we are invited to go through and you hear more about it next week in the church of Laodicea let me say a prayer father thank you for this time thank you for this word thank you for the picture of the church in Philadelphia and I just ask that you will burn it on our minds and hearts so that no matter what the circumstances that surround our individual lives may be or our corporate life may be that we may know that you are the one who opens the door when you open it nobody can shut it just brand that reality on our hearts and minds we ask in the name of Jesus Christ Amen