

Revelation

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[0 : 00] Father God, we thank you for the chance to gather tonight. We thank you for your word. We thank you for dads. We thank you for the chance to honour them today. But we pray that as we wrestle with your word now, that our ears and our hearts would be open to hear your voice and that we would be eager to change and be transformed as a result.

Amen. Well, being Father's Day, I thought this was a good chance to gloat and show off. And so I wanted to show you the gift that I received this morning, which is the fruit of my talented wife's photography and my son's obsession with sticks.

But I was pretty happy with it just the same. And it was a reminder for me of the journey up to being a dad in the first place. Those of you who were around for that saga will remember the 10 days that I endured after Bailey's scheduled arrival before he actually showed up.

And those who know me really well will know that I had predicted he was going to turn up two weeks earlier. So for me, it was three and a half weeks of torture waiting for him to turn up because I was busting to be a dad.

I just, I figured it's going to be exciting. It's going to be all fun and games. I'm just going to play with him and teach him stuff that he shouldn't know. And Sal's going to have to parent him properly. And I remember when he finally arrived in the hospital spending the first couple of hours where I got to hold him just staring at him.

[1 : 26] And he was screaming. He was, you know, all sorts of upset. He's like, what the hell just happened? But I was just staring at him thinking this is the best thing in the world. I was so excited.

I was so stoked to be a dad. And it only took me about maybe three days to realise that being a dad was going to be a little bit harder than I anticipated.

I remember laying in bed with Sal one night and Bay screaming in the other room has been for hours upon hours upon hours. And just laying there thinking, I'm not actually sure I can do this. Is there an exit strategy for somebody who's jumped into this prematurely? Like, is there a way around this? And then, you know, there's times where I've thought that maybe months after he'd been born.

There's times in the last week where I've thought that. Is there a way? I'm out of my depth. But when I began, it was all so easy. And when you're in those struggle moments as a new dad, people have advice.

[2 : 24] People have suggestions. People have recommendations. You know, maybe slip him some vodka in his nighttime milk, stuff like that. And there's helpful suggestions like just toughen up. It's all part of it.

And there's lots of people telling you what you must do. But when I started out, it just seemed like it was all going to be fun. It was all going to be joy. But there has been struggle.

Tonight, we open God's word to the letter to the church in Philadelphia. A church that had received the gospel and responded excitedly to the hope in Jesus that had started with such ambition for what their Christian life was going to be like.

And yet now they find themselves in a time of testing, in a time of trial. They find themselves in that moment wondering whether or not they've bitten off more than they can chew. Whether or not they'll actually last the distance when it comes to following Jesus.

And maybe you can reflect in your own life on times where you've wondered, should I just give up? Is this too hard to follow Jesus? Maybe it was because you were struggling personally.

[3 : 30] Maybe it was because of pain in your life that you couldn't understand in light of a God who was powerful and loving. Maybe it was because of temptation or failure on your part.

Maybe it was because of comfort and you just weren't sure that you needed God anymore. Whatever reason, this letter is a letter to us as well. This letter is to anybody who is following Jesus and either has or is or will ask the question, should I give up? Can I keep going? The church in Philadelphia, Philadelphia itself was a frontier Greek city. It was on the edge of the empire. It was a bastion for Greek culture. It was a city that was in turmoil at best. It was trying to be Greek but had all these other cultures pushing in on it. It had its name changed multiple times. It was prone to earthquakes. It was a wine growing region but the emperor wanted corn. There was lots of things working against you if you lived in Philadelphia. [4 : 33] And then on top of that we've got this fairly unimpressive little church facing persecution from the empire, facing persecution from the world, even facing persecution from the Jews and the synagogue in their city.

And so into that context you wonder what sort of advice will God have for them? What kind of suggestions? Will it be time for them to toughen up? Will it be a grand new strategy of world domination and evangelising? Well in this passage we find one simple instruction. But the really exciting thing is before we get to that instruction, Jesus wants to give seven commitments to this church that is struggling. And if you are feeling tired as a follower of Jesus, if you are feeling weary, then tonight Jesus wants to give you seven commitments to help you finish the race. His word is here not just to give instruction. His word is here to lift our eyes from the situation and circumstance that sometimes casts shadows over our life, that sometimes feels overwhelming. [5 : 48] And his word is there to lift our eyes to see him even in our circumstance. We started Revelation looking at chapter one and it's like God pulled back the curtain of the world and circumstances and situations and said, look behind and see the one who sits on the throne and has authority.

And tonight again for this struggling church in Philadelphia, he wants to say, look beyond your circumstance and look at the holy and true one who is committed to you. Verse eight. I know your deeds. This has been a chorus that resounds through all the letters in this first part of Revelation. I know. I know your deeds. I know where you live. Jesus is present with his church. As Philadelphia struggles, they need to be reminded that the one who sits on the throne is among them. The one who holds the stars in his hand is among them. The one who breathed the world into creation is among them. He knows what they're going through. He knows the situation more than that. [6 : 57] He knows the good that they are doing. Verse eight. I know your deeds. See, I've placed before you an open door that no one can shut. I know that you have little strength, yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name.

Jesus is aware of those little victories day to day where you choose his way over the world. He's aware of those little victories when you resist temptation and hold on to what you know is true and good. And he is glorified in that. This little, unimpressive, weak church. Jesus describes them as having little strength, and yet he is glorified by them because he knows their faithfulness, their commitment to him. Because they have held on to his word, they've been able to rise above their weakness, rise above their opposition, and hold fast to the one that they trust. One of our core values as a church here is Christ-centered Bible saturation, because the word is sufficient even when our strength is not.

[8 : 03] God knows our deeds. He knows our struggles. And he is glorified when we hold to him, even when it is difficult. First commitment that God makes to this church in Philadelphia is, I know. I am with you. I am there. And therefore, because I know your deeds, because I know you have been faithful, because you have held on to my words. Verse 8 again. I have placed before you an open door that no one can shut.

There is this great, the quote there in verse 7 that talks about Jesus being the one who is holy and true and holding the key of David. That's a quote from the Old Testament, from a passage in Isaiah

22.

And basically what's going on in Isaiah 22 is one of the priests over God's people, Israel, has been abusing his position. Israel has been sinful and rebellious, and they haven't been turning back to God.

And instead of the priest bringing them back to God, he's just been looking after himself. He's just been worrying about number one, and God lets him know that that's not going to be okay. And instead, God will put his own man into that role of high priest.

[9 : 13] And that man is described as having the key of David. It's like he holds the keys to who's in and who's out for the people of God. Who's in to receive the promises and who's out.

And here, when we are told that Jesus holds the key of David and that what he opens, no one can shut. And what he shuts, no one can open. And when he says, I've opened the door for Philadelphia, he means no one can kick you out of my promise.

The door that Jesus opens is the door to heaven. It is the door to God himself. It is access to the eternal throne. It is an eternal door for this little struggling church.

And hear it again. Jesus saying to you, if you struggle, if you trust him, if you stay true to the one who is holy and true, see he has placed an open door before you that no one can shut.

No one else decides whether or not you get into heaven. I don't. The church doesn't. The world doesn't. Only Jesus, who is holy and true and holds the key of David.

[10 : 22] And this church that has been kicked out of the synagogue, this church that has been excluded, is encouraged to hear the commitment of their savior. I have placed before you an open door that no one can shut.

But more than that, verse 9, another commitment from God to them. I will make those who are the synagogue of Satan, who claim to be Jews, though they are not, but are liars.

I will make them come and fall down at your feet and acknowledge that I have loved you. Jesus' commitment to this struggling people is, I will vindicate you.

Although you might feel ostracized at the moment, although you might feel marginalized, ultimately, you will be shown to be my true people. It is the great promise of the New Testament that one day every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that Jesus is Lord.

And if you belong to him, then they will be forced to acknowledge that you are the one he has loved.

You are the one who can stand in the judgment. You are the one who is invited into his presence.

[11 : 27] Jesus will vindicate his people no matter what opposition they face in this life. Ultimately and finally, those who trust Jesus will be vindicated. But not just ultimately and finally.

There is an immediate kind of vindication as well. This church in Philadelphia was surrounded by people who did not know Jesus. Some who were hostile, some who were ignorant.

He describes the Jews in this city as being a synagogue of Satan. It's a fairly stark description. And yet there is the opportunity for these people to have a witness to this synagogue of Satan.

To these Jews who have sought to close the door on the Christian community and say, you're not part of us. You're not one of us. There is an open door for this Christian community to reflect the God of love and hope and forgiveness and salvation.

In spite of their weakness, in spite of their lack of strength, their faithfulness to the word means that in this city, they have a chance, they have an open door to draw others in, to know Jesus.

[12 : 37] There will be vindication for you if you trust Jesus. Jesus, ultimately, but God willing also immediately.

Maybe you have family members who make fun of you for following Jesus. Maybe you have work colleagues or school friends who ridicule you for putting your faith in Jesus.

There is an encouragement here to remain faithful. Because ultimately God will show you to be the one that he has loved. And maybe, just maybe, he will use you to reveal himself to them as well.

He alone can open the door for them. And he may have placed you strategically in a time of trial or difficulty in order to help open that door for someone else.

Those who Jesus loves will be shown true because of their patient endurance. Because of their perseverance with him. Because they have transformed lives.

[13 : 41] And so there is a little warning for us there. Is your life being transformed? Are you enduring as somebody who loves Jesus?

I mean, did you catch verse 9 and 10? It says that he will vindicate them. And then verse 10, The vindication will come for those who have endured patiently.

The way you can tell the difference between somebody who is loved by God and who's not is that they will be enduring patiently. And so there's a warning for us. Are we enduring? Or is trial an opportunity for us to compromise instead?

The scary part about this great encouragement that Jesus is making, we're only up to commitment three that he's made. And yet he's had to affirm them for their endurance already.

And remind us that endurance is part of what it means to follow him. In spite of the great encouragement and joy, there will be struggle.

[14:47] There will be trial. It's come up time and time again in these letters. Following Jesus will be the difficult path in this life because the rest of the world doesn't want to know him. But he commits to us, I will vindicate you.

And there's the almost strange commitment of verse 10. Having just said, well done for enduring patiently. He says, I will also keep you from the hour of trial that is going to come upon the whole world to test those who live on the earth.

So which is it? Will he keep me from trial? Or will I get trial that I have to endure? It's confusing and I would have really loved it if verse 10 said, I will keep you in trial.

Because that would have been much easier to explain to you. Because we face trial. And so how do we do that? Jesus says, I will keep you from trial. But we know that our reality is right now we face trial.

I was looking through John's gospel and a prayer that Jesus prays for his disciples just before he is arrested and crucified and risen and ascended. And he prays for them in John chapter 17.

[16:00] Let me read it out for you. He prays using these words from verse 15. Verse 14. It's the same phrase.

Protect them from. And yet we know that every one of the disciples would face severe temptation and opposition and persecution for their faith in Jesus throughout the rest of their life.

The commitment from Jesus here isn't comfort. It's not easy life. But it's something better. He says, I pray that you would not take them out of the world, but you would protect them from the evil one.

And back in Revelation, he promises Philadelphia, I will keep you from the hour of trial. The commitment is here. The commitment here is that God will protect you as you endure.

He will protect you to make sure that no trial is too much. Because remember, the door he has opened, no one can shut. Jesus knows the struggles that we face.

[17:23] He has placed an open door that no one can shut. He will vindicate us. He will keep us from being overwhelmed in our trials. And so as we endure, he implores us to remember.

Verse 11. I am coming soon. So hold on to what you have so that no one will take your crown.

There's another verse that at first read I get a little bit uncomfortable with.

Have you ever read a promise like that and said, so when is soon? I remember I was on a family holiday when I was about 14 and we were traveling through South Africa. And one of the challenges of South Africa is now doesn't mean what I think it means.

So if you go and order some food and they say it's ready now, that means in 15 or 20 minutes. If you want it right now, it's ready now now. Now, that might sound redundant to you and I confess it was a little bit weird for me as a 14 year old.

But for them, now means at some point in the future. Whereas for us, it means right now.

Otherwise, we would have said at some point in the future. And so when we wrestle with a word like this, it's worth acknowledging that our definition of soon and God's definition of soon may not be exactly identical.

[18:42] But there is something incredibly encouraging about that phrase, even if we don't know the date that he's coming back. The point is, Jesus makes a commitment.

I am coming. The soon gives us that sense of absolute definite intention. He will be back. It's not a maybe.

He's not trying to decide. He's not seeing how things play out. He's saying, I'm coming. It's going to happen. Therefore, hold on to what you have so you don't miss out.

Hold on to the word that has been entrusted to you so that you do not miss out. Hold on and see that nobody takes the crown from you.

Takes the goal and prize that is waiting for you at the end. Hold on to what you have. All that Philadelphia has that we know about from this passage is the word of God and little strength.

[19 : 44] Those are the two things that they have. And that's what they're to hold on to. They're to hold on to the word of God because in spite of their little strength, it is mighty and powerful to sustain them in trial and struggle.

They are to hold on to the mighty word of God because in spite of their inadequacy, it is powerful and effective to draw others into the hope and salvation that is available in Jesus.

Sometimes in our trials, we cry out to God to give us something new, something more, something extra. But here Jesus wants to remind Philadelphia and wants to remind us, hold on to what you have because the mighty word of God is sufficient.

The second one is a little bit challenging, I think. Hold on to the little strength that you have. Have you ever thought of that as an attribute worth desiring or celebrating or rejoicing in?

Little strength? I wonder if when you come to church on a Sunday, you look around and think of us as a church of little strength.

[20 : 57] Or if you feel encouraged that we have a fairly full room of a fairly diverse group of people, that we have great music, that at least this room is not leaking, even if the one over there is.

There might be a sense that, you know, we're a pretty powerful church. And yet, although there is a lot to be thankful for from the spring fair yesterday, new contacts, great conversations, it's worth noting that we were sitting in front of a shop that is dedicated to Buddhism.

And our store was next door to a food vending store. Which means for a significant bulk of Chatswood, that's about how much we matter. If they even know that we exist.

In the area that God has placed us, we have little strength. In the task of seeking to reach people who don't know Jesus in our city and country, we have little strength.

In the task of persevering as individuals who love Jesus above all else, we have little strength. And that is only an attribute when it helps us come back to God's word and trust in his power at work in us.

[22 : 16] The great encouragement that Paul gives us in 2 Corinthians is that God's power is made perfect in weakness. And so Paul says, Hold on to what you have.

Little strength is only a good thing if you know that you have it. There is a great danger for us as a church because there is so much good that is happening around our church family that we begin to pride ourselves on a false sense of strength.

A false sense of security. Thinking somehow within our own abilities we can achieve what God wants us to achieve. Thinking we can raise the money we need for this building project.

Thinking that we can see all the people of Chatswood converted because we're really charismatic and we do good services. We have little strength. And that is God's gift to us so that we might be people who are devoted to him in prayer.

Who stand only on the power and foundation of his word. Who find our security in the hope of the gospel. What God has done for us in Jesus' death and resurrection.

[23 : 27] And in the hope of what he will do for us when he comes again. The fifth commitment that Jesus makes is I'm coming.

And because of that we get our one instruction. Hold on to what you have. Because he will be back. Because what he has already done is just the beginning.

Hold on. So that you do receive the crown that he has promised. The sixth commitment that Jesus makes to us in verse 12. Him who overcomes I will make a pillar in the temple of my God.

Never again will he leave it. These Christians had already been excluded from the synagogue.

Which they had maybe hoped might have been the place they would worship. Which was supposed to be the place where God was present.

Where he dwelt. And so Jesus' commitment to them is. If you stand firm. If you hold on. I will make you a pillar. In the temple of my God.

[24 : 28] I'll make you part of the furniture. I'll make you part of the structure. In such a way that you will never leave. That you are. You belong here. Jesus' commitment is that those who stand firm.

Will dwell forever in the presence of God almighty. Isn't that the goal? Isn't that everything that we hope for. And desire to finally be with God.

And Jesus says to this weak church. If you hold firm. I will make you a pillar. Seventh commitment he makes is in verse 12 as well.

I will write on him the name of my God. And the name of the city of my God. The new Jerusalem. Which is coming down out of heaven from my God. And I will also write on him my new name. One of the joys that I remember about school. Is the fact that everybody has the same clothes. And so if you take your jumper off at morning tea. The chances of picking up the correct jumper. [25 : 28] Is a bit of a challenge. I remember trying to invent ways throughout my life. Because I couldn't convince my parents. To stitch anything on there. To distinguish things as mine. So it would be little sneaky rips in wrist things.

So that I could say you've stolen my jumper. And I really like the way it fits. And I don't want your dodgy one. And so I would just come up with new ways. That I could identify things as mine. But the more traditional way to do that.

Would have been to get something with my name on it. And stitch it subtly on the inside of a jumper. Because that's what name tags do. They tell you what belongs to you. And here when we get this encouragement from Jesus.

This commitment from him. That if we stand firm. If we hold on. He will write his name on us. It is a taking possession of. He is marking you out as one of his.

As a belonging to him. As owned by him. As dearly loved by him. As part of his family. Part of his kingdom. This is the same promise if you like. As the open door that he has made earlier on.

[26 : 30] He is welcoming you in to those that belong to him. But there's also something else that's there. One of the great things in the Bible. Is that names reveal things about people.

I don't know if you remember a little while ago. We did a series in Hosea. And Hosea has his unfaithful bride. And Hosea is acting out judgment on the people of Israel.

He's a prophet. And so God tells him to name his kids. Things that communicate what God is feeling. Towards the people of Israel. And so his children are named things like.

Not loved. And not my people. And we might think that sounds particularly harsh. And I guess they're pretty not nice names. But names in the Bible hold and carry meaning like that.

It's the same with God's name. And so when we are told that we will have the new name of Jesus written on us here. It's pointing us to the new and fuller and final name of Jesus.

[27 : 29] Right now we have this incredible picture of Jesus. That we get through God's word. As the one who is there as God the Son in the beginning. As the one who came in flesh. As the one who died in our place.

As the one who rose again. The one who sits on the throne. As the one in chapter 1. Who is like blazing fire. Who holds the stars. Whose voice is like a rushing wind. We have but a snapshot. Of all that is Jesus. And this new name that we will receive when he returns. And gathers us up. Will be the full name. It will reveal all of him.

We will get to see him and know him fully. The promise of scripture is that right now we know just a fraction. As much as we can handle. But there will be a day when God opens our minds.

And enables us to know him. In all his glory. The Christian life is not an easy life. But what an encouragement Jesus gives to us when we struggle tonight.

[28 : 28] Because he is the one who is holy and true speaking these words. Because he has opened a door that cannot be shut by his blood on the cross.

And because he will return. Because he will vindicate you. Because he will keep you in trial. Hear the one instruction that he gives you. Hold on to what you have.

Hold on to God's word. Hold on to your need for him because of your little strength. Hold on and one day receive the crown that God has promised to those who love him.

If you are struggling right now. Jesus doesn't want to add weight to your struggle.

He doesn't want to tell you to fix it or improve. He wants you to hear that he is committed to you. He has done what needs to be done so that you belong to him.

[29 : 33] He has opened a door that cannot be shut. And he is coming back to make sure you walk through it. Because of who he is. Hold on.

And receive the crown. Let's pray. Father God, we want to thank and praise you for the great encouragement you give to this church in Philadelphia.

We want to thank you for your great patience with us in our failures. In our doubts. In our struggles. We want to thank you for Jesus.

For his willingness to die in our place. For his presence among us at the moment by your spirit. For his power at work in us. Father, we want to ask that we might grab hold of the fact that we have little

strength and instead depend on your perfect power at work in us.

God, help us to remember that you will. God, help us to remember that what you have opened no one can shut.

[30 : 49] Help us to remember that you know and you are with us. Help us to remember that you will one day vindicate your people and vindicate your name.

Help us to remember that you're coming soon. And help us to hold on. In Jesus name.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Thank you.

Amen. Amen.