

Revelation Chapter 3

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Preacher: Rev Kenneth I Macleod

[0 : 00] Let's turn again to the chapter we read in Revelation chapter 3, and I want us to look very briefly at the words of our Lord to the church in Philadelphia, and words that we know, some of these verses are quite familiar to us.

I won't read it all, but I want us just to, by way of overview, to look at these words to the angel of the church in Philadelphia, write the words of the Holy One, the True One, the One who is the key of David, who opens and no one will shut, who shuts and no one opens.

I know your works. Behold, I have set before you an open door, which no one is able to shut. I know that you have but little power, and yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name, and so on.

Now, as we come to the end of our year, I think it's always good for us to reflect back upon ourselves.

It's good to reflect individually, personally, as to how things are with you, and it's also good to reflect not only individually, but as far as a church is concerned or a congregation is concerned.

[1 : 19] I think it's something we should often be doing, and I think it's always wise whenever we reflect upon, whether we're reflecting upon ourselves individually, our life, or reflecting as a congregation, that we should always be measuring ourselves, not against others.

It's not a good way of reflecting. We don't make our judgments about how we're doing by looking at other people and assessing their life and then assessing our own life. That's not a good way.

It's not a good way as a congregation to say, well, let's look at other congregations. We should always be taking our assessment from God's Word. We should be examining ourselves in the light of God's Word, personally, individually, and congregationally, because if we start measuring against other people, we become very judgmental, and we're told in the Bible, Jesus tells us, judge not that ye be not judged.

Now, one of the things that's very obvious when we come to look at our Lord's messages to the various churches is that they themselves often didn't really know how things were.

And, for instance, the church in Laodicea had a completely wrong view of themselves. They thought they were a church who needed nothing. That's what they said.

[2 : 47] Their own assessment of themselves was, we're actually very good. We're in a pretty good condition. Things are going well. We're healthy. And the Lord is saying to them, no, to the very church that's saying, we are in need of nothing.

He is saying, you're poor, and you're naked, and you're blind. He was saying to them, things actually are grim. And I often wonder, what would the Lord's assessment be of ourselves?

Because we're always going to remember that the Lord sees in a way that you and I cannot see. You see, we see the outward. We think we know. We don't. We think we know about other people. We don't have a clue.

But the Lord sees into our heart. He knows our motives. He's able to evaluate what we do and why we do it, the hows and the whys and the whats of life.

The Lord is able to see all these things in a way that you and I have no idea at all. And so the Lord is giving the message to this church in Philadelphia.

[3 : 47] And as we can see, although it's quite a small church and a weak church, it is, in many ways, it's a strong church. It might be weak, but it is strong, strong in the Lord and the power of His might.

And it's a church that, by and large, has a fairly glowing report from heaven, even although they may find things pretty difficult. And the Lord says, the words of the Holy One, the true One, the One who has the key of David, who opens and no one will shut, who shuts and no one opens.

Now, of course, the keys of David, we read about that in the prophecy of Isaiah. And you remember that David, of course, was the king that God had appointed over Israel.

Remember, if you follow through the history of Israel, they were ruled by prophets and by judges. And there came a time when they said, we want a king. We want to be like all the other nations round about.

And God gave them what they wanted, and they chose this man Saul. And Saul, while he had a good beginning, he soon fell away. And God then said, well, I'll give you a king.

[5 : 01] I will give you a king, a man after my own heart. And that man, of course, was David. And David, in many ways, was something, a type of Christ.

And, of course, the kingdom of how he dominated and ruled, eventually conquered everything, is a great picture of how the kingdom of God, not with weapons of human warfare, but by the power of God, will eventually grow and establish itself into this world.

And so, the keys of David are spoken about there. And what Eliakim, who was given this key, which opened a door to all the power and all the wealth belonging to the king.

And so, in a sense, the Lord is saying, I have this key, this key to all the power and all the wealth. Now, of course, Jesus isn't talking about riches in the sense of cash or bars of gold or such.

He's talking here primarily about the spiritual riches of life, things that money can't buy. And if we try and find, now, I'm not for one moment suggesting that any person who doesn't have Jesus can be happy in life.

[6 : 21] Of course, they can. And there are lots of situations in life and lots of experiences that we really enjoy. And there are lots of things that we get and we enjoy having them.

And lots of places we go and we enjoy going there. And, of course, we do. But to get really down into the very depth of our being. To find in life a deep-rooted meaning and a deep-rooted satisfaction where life comes together.

Where there is an awareness of our identity in this world. Of who we are. Of who we belong to. Of where we are ultimately going.

Of these things. Of experiencing deep-rooted peace within our heart. With an awareness of this sense of joy deep within us.

That isn't based upon the outward circumstances and things that are happening. It's only the Lord who can give that. And He gives it by us having Himself.

[7 : 26] It's not something that the Lord has like on a shelf. And He says, well, I'm going to give you a wee bit here of my peace. No, He gives us Himself. Through the Spirit. And as He does so, His peace fills our heart.

So that even though the outward can be turmoil, deep down there is this peace. His love, His peace, His joy. These are things. You can't put a price on these things.

You can't buy them. And so Jesus is saying here, look, I have the key. I have the key to life. I have the key to the prosperity that makes life really worthwhile.

And as we come to the end of a year, if there's anybody here who hasn't experienced that, who does not have Jesus as it were the key to life, I would urge you today to seek Jesus.

Ask Him to come into your heart. But you see, it's not only a key that opens doors, but also shuts and secures. Now, of course, if we have valuables or anything, we lock them away.

[8 : 30] We put something, lock it away, keep it safe. And that's one of the wonderful things in Jesus is He is the ultimate security. In fact, Jesus, as He talks in John 10 about the good shepherd, He says that anybody who comes to Me and who I am shepherding in life, He talks about Him being in My hand, and He talks about that person being in the Father's hand.

And then He goes on to say, no one can pluck them out of My hand and out of My Father's hand. There's no power, no force, no strength anywhere, collectively or individually, that can prize open the hand of God, the hand of the Son, and pluck the believer out.

And so it's a wonderful thing to have this. That doesn't mean that in life we won't have our sorrows and our pains and our difficulties, but it means that ultimately there is nothing that will ever, ever take you away.

Nothing. You see, that's what Jesus did. Jesus came into this world. Jesus didn't, as we know this, but Jesus didn't just come as an example. He came as a sacrifice.

He came to do things for us we couldn't do ourselves. He went in our room instead. He fulfilled the law for us. He died for us. He rose victorious for us.

[10 : 09] And that is why we're able to look at death and say, death, where's your sting? Because there's an awful sting in death. But Jesus has removed the sting.

Grave. Ah, grave's an awful place. Grave, where's your victory? See, you're going to have to, the grave's going to open. Grave's going to have to give up. And you see, even although death comes and the grave seems to be grabbing, it's only for a wee while.

Because Jesus, as he rose from the dead, is saying, you will also rise from the dead. This is what makes the Bible so different, so real.

Now, of course, it is. At the end of the day, it's all by faith. But this is what faith does. Faith makes things that we can't see.

It makes it visible. Faith takes hold of what we read about, and we believe it to be so true that we know it's going to happen.

[11 : 16] We are absolutely persuaded. These things will happen. We cannot explain them. It goes way beyond our understanding.

But faith says, I know. This is real. This is true. And you stake your life upon it. And so, the Lord is saying to them, I've set before you an open door, and no one can shut it.

That must have been so encouraging to the church. An open door. An open door of prayer. An open door of witness. An open door of service. All these things. And Jesus then says to them, I know that you have a little power, but you haven't denied my name.

And so, it must have been incredibly encouraging to this church to know that at the end of the day, it's not according to the size. The size of numbers, or the size of collections, or the size of... It's the size of their heart in relation to the Lord.

They felt weak, but they were faithful. And they were living... They were, I suppose, living epistles. They were there living to and for the Lord, despite all the difficulties.

[12 : 32] And the Lord is saying, look, I'm with you. I've set before you an open door. Lots of people are going to try and harm you. Lots of people are giving you a hard time. The Jews, it would appear, were giving them a hard time.

That's what it says in 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.

It's amazing how much in the way of religion is pushed on by Satan. Satan, of course, is... One of the things he describes, or the Bible describes him, is as an angel of light.

And Jesus himself has said, there's going to come days when those who kill you think they're doing God a service. And that's happened right down throughout the history of the church.

It's an awful thought, but it's possible because the whole persecution of the church, it's so irrational. But when you think about it, they persecuted Jesus.

[13 : 42] They put Jesus to death. They hated Jesus without a cause. And the world has a hatred so often of the followers of Jesus. But Jesus says, there's going to come a day when people, the persecutors, are going to see that they got it all wrong.

And they're going to have to bow down and acknowledge before you that I have loved you, that your love, that they got it so completely wrong.

And that was going to be so much encouragement to this church here. And so the Lord is promising them that he's going to look after them.

And then Jesus again tells them that he's coming soon. That's one of the things. 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.

[14 : 51] I am coming soon. And so the Lord is giving this promise to the church that even during the trials and the hard things that is going to envelop them and envelop the church, he will be with them.

And then he says, I'm coming soon. And the idea here is of coming suddenly. And that is something that the Lord has repeatedly spoken about in Scripture, that his appearance is going to be sudden.

We've so often said it because it's so often found in Scripture. That's what we're saying to the young people today about being prepared. And in light of his sudden coming, the Lord says then, I am coming soon.

Hold fast what you have so that no one may seize your crown. Hold fast. Now, if you hold something fast, that means you hold it secure.

And if you're going to hold something really tight, you do so because, A, it's valuable. It's something that's precious to you, something that's worthwhile.

[15 : 58] And when you hold something tight, it implies effort. It implies putting effort into it. And so the Lord is saying to this church, you hold, hold this crown, hold fast what you have so that no one take your crown.

And I know that you are weak, but I'm giving you strength. Now, I think we've said before, it's very hard for us to gauge our own strength.

You see, sometimes we can feel very weak when we're actually strong. And an example of that is Gideon. Because the angel came to Gideon and said, you mighty man.

And you can almost look at Gideon looking over his shoulder. Mighty man, where's the mighty man? But it was to him the angel was saying. The Lord has appointed you. You're going to deliver Israel.

And Gideon couldn't believe this because he looked at himself. He looked at his father's tribe. And his father's household, he thought, was the weakest in the whole tribe.

[17 : 06] And he himself felt that he was the weakest in his father's household. So, when the angel comes to Gideon and says, you mighty man, that's why I mean Gideon is looking over his shoulder and thinking the angel must be seeing somebody else beside him or behind him.

But you see, the Lord was empowering Gideon. And Gideon was used mightily by God. And Gideon, despite his faults, takes his place rightly in the hall of faith in Hebrews.

But then you can have the very opposite, where a person thinks that they're really strong and actually they're weak, like Peter. Peter thought he was stronger than any of the other disciples.

Jesus said to the disciples, you're all going to run away. You're all going to forsake me. And Peter says, though others may forsake you, I won't.

And Peter went on to say, you know, to Jesus, I am ready to go to prison with you and I'm ready to die with you. Peter meant what he said.

[18 : 10] He thought he was really strong. But Peter made the mistake of relying on his own strength. And when the testing time came, Peter fell spectacularly.

And we've got to be careful that we don't live on yesterday's strength. Because we may be strong one day and as weak as water the next.

David made that problem. When you see David having Uriah put to death to try and cover his sin, to try and cover how he had taken Bathsheba, remember Uriah's wife, and in order to, because of that relationship they had a, remember how Bathsheba discovered that she was pregnant and she sent word.

And David says, well, I've got to deal with this. And the only way he could deal with it was getting Uriah killed. David was there probably at his weakest point.

How different to the man who went out to face Goliath. The young David who was, his strength was completely in the Lord. He said he went out with a sling and his few stones.

[19 : 25] He wasn't looking at the sling and stones. He was looking at the Lord. He says, I come to you. It's not with swords and spears and all these kind of things. I come to you in the name of the Lord of hosts. David was so strong in the Lord there.

He could face the lion, the bear, the great Philistine juggernaut, the human juggernaut that was coming at him. No problem in the sense because his faith and his eyes were upon the Lord.

But at this point, his eyes are so off the Lord that he's just struggling. So we can see that a great man, as one as God himself said, a man after my own heart, that there can be periods in a person's life where they lose the focus and they become like Samson, weak like other men.

Samson's another classic example of living in yesterday's strength. God had empowered him. And gradually, bit by bit, he was being sucked down. People are often hard on Samson.

I think Samson was a great man, just as I do David. I think David's one of the most wonderful men that the Bible ever shows us, despite his weaknesses. And Samson was a great man of faith as well.

[20 : 40] I often think it's maybe, it says more about ourselves than for anything else when we home in. And very often we do that. We home in on their weaknesses. Because I think it makes us feel a little better ourselves.

We say, oh, he's a man of faith, but I remember what he did there and did there. Samson was a great man of faith. But as we said, he had his weakness.

But there came a time, remember, when his hair was cut. And the great sign of that vow was, as it were, cut. And when the Philistines came on him, he said, I will go out against them as at other times.

And he just shook himself and out he went, expecting to cause mayhem. But the strength was gone. The spirit of the Lord, which had been upon him in great power.

The Lord had withdrawn. Not that the Lord had left him. But that tremendous influence of power that was visible within his life was withdrawn. And he was just weak like other men.

[21 : 44] So you see, our strength and our weakness is a strength. And we can, although it's a horrible thing to feel weak, it's good if our weakness drives us to the Lord.

So that we're cast upon him and saying, Lord, I can't do this unless you help me, unless you empower me. And you know, that's actually how it is all the days of our life.

The days that we're likely to end up struggling are the days we think we're strong. The days we think we've cracked it. The days we think we're on top. These are dangerous days.

The days when we're relying upon him are the best days, however difficult they may appear to be. So the Lord is saying, see that nobody sees your crown.

What's the crown? Well, I believe the crown, first and foremost, is just the gospel itself. That is the crown. That's, I think, above everything else.

[22 : 46] But you see, the great thing about this crown, the gospel, is that it leads to crowns. It leads to other crowns. The gospel, the Bible speaks to us about these kind of crowns.

For instance, the Bible talks about the crown of glory, talks about the crown of righteousness, talks about the crown of life.

And I think, as in the early church, they would have understood very clearly when John was writing about the different crowns.

For instance, it was often a floral wreath was given, say, at the time of the games when they would have, the winner would be given this floral wreath.

And, of course, there are so many examples given in the Bible to Christianity and the Christian life being like a race. It's running a race. Frequently, we find this description.

[23 : 45] There is so much to be found in the symbolism between the athletic meeting and between the Christian life in the same way as the soldier. And, again, the victorious general was given this floral wreath.

And that's what the Christian life is like. It's like a battle. It's a conflict. Fight the good fight of faith. The bride also wore a floral wreath.

And, again, that's the description of what the church is like. We are the bride of Christ. He is the bridegroom. And it's all moving forward to that day where there will come the great marriage feast where the whole church will be brought in together.

The marriage supper of the Lamb, where the church becomes the Lamb's wife, will not be until the whole church is gathered together.

Till the completion of the high priestly prayer, Father, I will that those whom thou hast given me be with me where I am.

[24 : 52] When thou hast given me when thou hast given me a number that no man can number. You know, I heard a wonderful description of that recently.

And I've often, I can't give you the facts and the figures, but I've often wondered about that, a number that no man can number.

And I says, well, how is that possible? Well, I heard recently that the, I'm not sure what's the world's population, it's something like seven, is it seven billion, something like that.

And that nine, by 2030, it's anticipated the world's population be something like nine billion. And it was somebody working out by some way of calculation that if a person was going to spend every day, and I don't mean that in the 24 hours, but in the, as long as a day is, and they were to start counting individually all the people in the world, it would take them 200 years to actually count them.

So that if we put a lifespan, as the Bible talks about, 70 years, or if by strength, 80 years, it's simply meaning that the number in glory will be far greater than that any person could actually physically count in their lifetime.

[26 : 24] And I think that's a great explanation to that, a number that no man can number. I often wondered what exactly that meant. And that just shows that the huge number that the Lord is going to take in.

Well, it's not until the last person is in that we will come then to the marriage supper of the Lamb, and where the church will become the Lamb's wife.

She's so often been taught, there's talking about the engagement, there's talking about the bride and the bridegroom, talking about the marriage, and then in to eventually becoming the Lamb's wife.

And so we find this here, we're told then in verse 11, In the front of Solomon's temple, the great porch there, there were two huge pillars.

And the names of these pillars, the meaning of the names was, He will establish, and in him is strength. That's what these names actually meant. And I would say that the two things that we so often lament and mourn is our lack of strength and our lack of stability.

[28 : 02] Because as Christians, we often feel so weak, and we often feel so unstable. There are times we think, well, you know, I feel, as I say, I feel I'm really growing as a Christian, things going well, and then all of a sudden crash.

And we say to ourselves, you know, I'm so, I am so, sometimes we say, I'm so inconsistent, I feel so weak, I feel so unstable.

And the Lord is saying, ah, no. This is how it's going to be, strength and stability. These are the two roots that are going to be there.

And you're going to be like two pillars in my temple. And of course, this is the wonderful thing is that in glory, there will be no temple as such, no temple built with hands, no temple of stones.

It's the people of God who are going to be the temple in glory. And it says there that I will write on them the name of my God and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which comes down from God.

[29 : 11] This is a wonderful thing. Here is this beautiful picture, picture of heaven. And so the Lord is going to write, he says, so I will write on him the name of my God.

That's what we're told. There's so many descriptions given to us in the Bible of like the Lord write. For instance, he says, I will write on their forehead. The Lord, it's speaking of ownership, of belonging.

If you buy a book, and this is a book you wanted to get for a long time. You wanted this book. And knowing how we can sometimes lend books and give books to others and so on, we say, well, what I'm going to do right now is I'm going to write my name on this.

Because if it goes out, then at least my name is on it. So that I'll get it back. Ownership, it's mine. And that's really what the Lord is saying of his people.

You're mine. My name is on you. You don't belong to anybody else. You belong to me. And I don't think we understand how much the Lord actually loves us.

[30 : 29] He loves us with an eternal love. He loves us. Do you want to think just how much the Lord loves you? Go to Calvary.

That's how much. His only beloved son. And you see him a mangled, battered, bruised, broken person on that cross.

That's how much God loves you. That he did that. To his son for you. It's impossible to do any more. He did the very greatest that it could be.

And so today, the Lord is saying to you, I've set before you an open door. Jesus is passing by. Will you accept him as your Lord?

Let us pray. O Lord, our gracious God, we ask to bless us and we give thanks for the great hope of the gospel. We give thanks, O Lord, that today we are able to delight in it.

[31 : 39] O watch over us, we pray, and shelter us and shield us under your love. May that banner of love be over us. Grant us thy grace continually.

Take us all home safely, we pray, forgiving us our sin. In Jesus' name. Amen.