

Revelation 3:7-13

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 27 March 2016

Preacher: Rev James Maciver

[0 : 00] of this chapter, Revelation 3, verses 7 to 13. These letters to the seven churches with which the book of Revelation begins, very soon after the beginning, are very interesting in many respects.

They were, of course, actual churches when these letters were written, when John was given this revelation from the Lord when he was in the Isle of Patmos.

But they also represent certain features of the church and certain conditions that the church will find herself in down through the ages through to Christ's return.

Revelation is, as you know, a very symbolic book, and they're full of symbolism. And one of the ways in which the symbolism is carried out is around the number seven, which is found frequently in different ways throughout the book of Revelation, or multiples of seven.

And you have the seven churches as well, showing us that that itself in the Lord's way is, in a sense, the complete definition of what the church may experience and will experience down through the ages.

[1 : 28] Now, that doesn't mean that they experience, that we experience these things in every generation to the same degree or to the same extent. But as you go through these letters to the churches, you'll find various key words that appear or are repeated.

And, of course, the Bible's repetitions are intended not just to aid our memory, but to remind us of emphasis that comes to us from the Lord.

Key words such as suffering, truth, holiness, love, life, opportunity, repentance, recovery, and many others.

All of these are built into the seven letters. And we're looking at this one this evening to the church in Philadelphia. All of these churches were actually located not too far away from each other in what is now largely western Turkey.

And we'll find that a church like Philadelphia, while it was existing in John's time, like some of the other ones here, have disappeared.

[2 : 37] There is no church now, as far as we know, in Philadelphia or many of these other areas as well. And that itself is a solemn fact for us.

We should never just simply assume that the gospel will always be here. It will only be here, of course, by God's blessing, but it will only be here also as we continue to serve the Lord and minister in his name as the church of Christ here in our day.

Three things here that we can look at briefly. We're not going to look at every detail in this letter to Philadelphia, but three things very briefly that we will look at that will be useful to ourselves to carry with us into our life as a church or as a congregation.

Here's a church, first of all, under the stewardship of Jesus. A church under the stewardship of Jesus. This writing of the letter to the angel of the church in Philadelphia, the angel is always mentioned in relation to each of these churches, different opinions as to what that actually means. Maybe it's the minister, the pastor, it could be an angel, literally, all these different views. We're not spending time over that. What we're concerned for is what is actually said to this church.

[4 : 05] 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. A church under the stewardship of Jesus.

He describes himself as the Holy One, the True One, who has the key of David and opens and no one will shut, who shuts and no one opens. This is Jesus describing himself.

This is not John's opinion as to what Jesus is like or who Jesus is or what authority Jesus has. This is the Lord describing himself.

This is the Lord's knowledge of who he is and of what he is about and what position he occupies. He is the Holy One, the True One, the One that is himself God and holy as God is holy, the One who is himself true and therefore always dependable, the One that you can trust in and rely upon absolutely, the One who is never short of fulfilling his promises or any aspect of his truth, the One who will always be seen to be true in carrying out all aspects of his great plan.

Revelation, of course, is a book that is largely taken up with the Lord and his people against all who are his enemies and emphasizes that the victory is already with Christ and already with his people, that he reigns and his people reign with him and whatever circumstances they find themselves in in this life, however much they may be hounded and however much persecuted and put to death, they are the Lord's people.

[5 : 54] They are the Lord's flock. He is their head. He is their King. He is, in fact, presiding over all things for them and for their benefit. He is the absolutely dependable One, the Holy One, the One who never lies, the One who cannot lie, the One that you can trust, whose words you can carry into every facet of life and know that they will always be true and always be relevant to your circumstances.

And that will be something, God willing, that we will keep coming back to in our services, God willing, from now on.

This is something that we will come back to repeatedly because the Bible comes back to it repeatedly. The Lordship of Christ, the way in which Christ himself presides over our lives, over the world, over its history.

As he has seen in the early part of this book, in the very beginning of the book, as one who was so glorious in his appearance.

As you see him also in chapter 5, following that great emphasis of the throne in chapter 4, here is a great question. Who is worthy to open this scroll?

[7 : 13] The scroll that has within it the whole unfolding of human history right through to the end of the world. Who is worthy to open it? Who's going to manage this?

Who is capable of taking this and managing it right through to its finest details and managing even its greatest events? I saw a throne, and on the throne one that was like unto a lamb as it had been slain.

And of him it was said, you are worthy to take the scroll and to open it. That's who we worship this evening.

That is who our head is as the head of the church. This one who is the holy one, the true one. The one who is the president over all human history.

And whose hand guides infallibly every aspect of his plan as he has purposed to carry it out whatever people may think in any generation, whatever even his church may think in any generation.

[8 : 24] This is who he is. This is the one that we will come more and more, we trust, to know and to speak about and to present through the gospel. Jesus, the King, the glorious Lord.

Lord. Because that's what every single page of the Bible in some way or another actually brings you to. Wherever you start, you will always find a line directly or indirectly back to this person who is the Alpha, the Omega, as this book of Revelation calls him.

But you see what it's saying. He has the key of David who opens and no one will shut, who shuts and no one opens. Now that goes back to that description as almost word for word something you find in the prophecy of Isaiah chapter 22 regarding Eliakim who was a steward over the household of Hezekiah.

And very interestingly, this is really just picking up that passage in Isaiah and applying it here to Christ who has this quality preeminently and this authority preeminently who has the key of David. Who opens and no one will shut, who shuts and no one opens. It's the key of David because he is David's son as was said of him when he was born as you find in the Gospel of Luke.

[9 : 52] To him shall be given the throne of his father David and of his kingdom there shall be no end. And as Eliakim was a steward over the royal house in Hezekiah's day, so Jesus is the steward of God's house, of God's kingdom.

You begin perhaps at Ephesians chapter 1 verse 22 where you find an emphasis on God having raised him from the dead as we were reminded of this morning on this commemoration on Easter Sunday of the resurrection of Christ from the dead that he is risen.

But he is not just raised from the dead, he has been raised from the dead and he is now made head over all things to his church. And you go from that to his parting words to the disciples before he ascended to heaven.

all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. And Hebrews chapter 3 and verse 6 compares him and contrasts him with Moses and says that he, Jesus, is faithful over his own house as Moses was over God's.

In other words, you have the stewardship of Jesus as he himself is a steward over the kingdom and over the house of God. It is to Jesus that we look for one who has the authority and one who has been given the trust as a steward must be trustworthy.

[11:41] He has been given the trust by God the Father and the authority to have access to the things of the kingdom, to dispense the things of the kingdom, to actually be himself steward in actually opening up all sorts of treasures, even the unsearchable riches that are his in order to dispense them to us through the gospel.

What a prospect. How that should excite us that tonight we're not actually in the business of falling down before some relic that can do nothing for you, that we're not in the business of actually following some creed or other that a mere human being has devised and drawn up that people will then slavishly follow.

Our allegiance is to the one who has the key of David and that has connotations and application in a very wide perspective.

He has the key with which to open the kingdom to us. We'll see that in a minute. He talks about having an open door set before the church in Philadelphia.

But he is the one who has the key to the door. Who is it that opens the key to let us into the kingdom, to admit us to the kingdom? It is he. It is the king himself.

[13:10] Who is it that closes the door? It is the king himself. And not only that, but in the wider perspective, Christ holds the key to every door of every chapter of human history.

It's very interesting how God throughout history has come to show up the arrogance of great empires and bring them to nothing.

Right through in the Old Testament, from the time of Egypt, right through to Assyria, and then Babylon. And if you go to Isaiah chapter 14, just to the one example of how God, through the prophet, was speaking through him directly to the people, but also incorporating Babylon and that great world power of the time was the destiny of the world in their hand.

The Babylonian king thought it was. But in that great chapter, there's a lot of verses there that speak about the other side of death, and there's a picture there of people in the realm of the dead, and all of a sudden they see this great figure who terrorized people in this world, who held the people of God captive, and he's coming into the realms of the dead, and they're filled with amazement, so the picture is, and saying, have you become like one of us?

Who's opened the door to the grave, to the great Nebuchadnezzar? This king has. Who actually brings empires to be raised up and then to come to nothing?

[15:03] This king does. Who tonight is in charge of the Middle East? Humanly speaking, we might say it's impossible to answer that.

Is it IS? Is it any of the political leaders? Is it any of the Western powers? You might say it's all a mess.

It's a shambles. It's a tragedy. Of course it is. as you look at it, as you see the destruction, the havoc, the violence, the wanton destruction, the mass executions.

It's not easy to find an answer to why. nothing. But we know that God, Christ, this king, has not left his throne.

That he is in charge of this slice of human history as much as any other. And that's what brings us back from despair, back from thinking that the world is just uncontrolled chaos.

[16:16] us. It may be indeed in human terms, but this is still the one who rules, the one who has the key of David, who opens and no one will shut, who shuts and no one opens.

He has the key to unlock all events and to unlock even such things as your own heart. Who has unlocked your heart if you're a Christian tonight?

it's this king, isn't it? Who came into your life to open the door to your heart? It's this king.

Who can open the door to your heart if you're not yet a Christian? What kind of power does it take? Is it your new minister that's going to do it? God forbid! But it is this king who will do it.

And you have to look to this king and you have to look to this Jesus, to this Jesus who is here such a powerful, dominant, authoritative, yet loving figure, who comes to open doors and close them.
[17 : 29] He is the steward of his church, the steward of history, the one in whose hands the development of the world right through to the end is placed.

Secondly, it's a church engaged in the service of Jesus. I have set before you an open door which no one is able to shut. I know that you have but little power, yet you have my word and have not denied my name, and so on.

Let's just look at a few of the details there. I have set before you an open door. Now that means a number of things that could indicate for us the door of the gospel itself, the door into salvation of which Christ himself is the key, is the key keeper, is the one who holds the key to it, as the one who has the key of David.

I'm setting before you an open door. And here in the gospel, that is what Christ is assuring us of tonight. There is an open door into salvation. It's still open, it's open for you, even if you have not yet come to go through it.

Please don't just admire it from outside as you can do by knowing the facts of the Bible, by knowing the teachings of the Bible, the doctrines of the Bible, all of that, and engaging in the worship of God, all of which is so, so good.

[18 : 49] But it's a lot better to actually be inside a house that you then look around and admire than to look through the windows and admire it from outside.

It might give some element of satisfaction that you're able to do it from outside and you can see some of the things in the kingdom, some of the things in this house over which he is the steward. word. But you really want to come in, don't you? You really want to enjoy the provisions of it. And what he's saying to you is, I'm setting before you an open door.

And as long as the gospel is proclaimed, the door is open. but it's open for you not to say, well it's open and there's still plenty time to think about it.

It might not be open tomorrow. It might not be open even later tonight for you. you're not assured that you'll see tomorrow.

[19 : 54] But you are assured that today salvation in Christ is open to you with all its fullness, all its provision.

And not only that, but if you go to 1 Corinthians, the open door by the apostle Paul there is used as an indication of how God had opened a door of opportunity to him.

A door for the gospel, not just a door into salvation for each of us personally, but also a door for the gospel, for our service of Christ in the gospel.

And you could say that that surely is part of what he's saying to this church in Philadelphia. It's not a very strong church, it's a very young church, there's not a very robust church in itself, but he's saying, I have opened the door for you.

I am keeping it open for you. It's not dependent on your own strength. I have set before you an open door. Let's take that with us as you look out over the town of Stornoway and its environs and wherever else you live.

[21 : 08] Because God has provided for us through the gospel a door of opportunity. Yes, there's opposition, but God is saying to this church in Philadelphia facing the opposition, they're facing and they're facing a lot of opposition and it's not easy being a Christian in Philadelphia, but he's saying, I have set before you an open door.

I'm keeping the door open. It's my hand that's keeping it open. It's my arm that's actually holding it open for you. We don't worry about whether or not the door will close.

As long as Jesus is keeping it open, that's your advantage, that's your opportunity, that's for this great congregation such a welcome emphasis that we serve a king who is holding the door open for us.

You don't have to open it. It's not your ingenuity that opens doors. It's not the gifts that he's given you that opens doors. He has opened the door and he keeps it open.

That's what you and I have to take advantage of while we have the opportunity, the strength, the wherewithal to do it. We would not like to face the Lord at last and not have used the opportunity that his opening of the door has given us.

[22 : 34] There's a town here to evangelize. There's a town here with many problems, spiritual, moral problems. There are people there tonight who are themselves desperate for something on

which to build their lives.

And they know themselves that what they have is not adequate. And they're looking for something, and you know the something that they're looking for is actually here through this door that Jesus is holding open into his salvation.

salvation. And by this door, that door of opportunity that he's given you and I to serve him. Every single one of us, friends, whether we're confessing Christians already or not, we have something that we can do for the Lord.

And that's surely what we want to do in days to come together to serve the Lord. I have set before you an open door and no one can shut it. See, that's important as well.

whatever kind of opposition you're facing, however strong the atheism or humanism or whatever of our day might be, however much it may seem to us that the door is undoubtedly going to be closed by them to the gospel, you remember whose hand keeps the door open.

[23 : 58] It is this great Savior, this Lord, this King, I have set before you. this open door. And you have a little power, and yet you have not denied my name.

Now he's saying there, I know that you have but little power, and yet you have kept my word and not denied my name. Having little power ourselves is not a disadvantage.

the apostle Paul himself had to learn that. And in the way that he learned it, he passed it on to us through his writings.

And he said especially that it was when he was weak, then he was strong. What did he mean by that? It meant that as he presented his weakness or himself in his own native weakness to Jesus, then the power of Christ actually used that human weakness and the power of God was made perfect or brought to its completion.

Isn't that a remarkable thing? That something that does not belong to God, that weakness, is made perfect or brought into its own, or however you translate it, through something that we have this weakness.

[25 : 24] This human frailty, this weakness, as Paul said, elsewhere to the Corinthian church, we have this treasure in earthen vessels and vessels of clay, things which so easily crack, that's what our human life itself is like, so that the excellency of this power might be of God and not of us.

How are people going to actually see God in our lives? Is it when we bring ourselves to the fore? Is it when we think, well I can do it? Is it by our own gifts or our own strength?

No, it's when we say to God, Lord, I have no strength of my own. I can't convert people. I can't influence people so that they'll receive you in a way that will open their heart, but you have the key, you have the power, and you can use my very weakness to good effect.

Remember the famous incident where Jesus, with 5,000 people in front of him, said to the disciples, go and feed these people.

And they only found a few small fish and a few scones. That's all they had. And the word that was brought to Jesus by the disciples was, Lord, what are these among so many?

[26 : 45] What are these among so many? Humanly speaking, that's not going to feed more than two or three people, and we have 5,000. What happened?

They were put into the hands of Jesus. And as soon as they were put into the hands of Jesus, things were transformed. And they not only fed the 5,000, but they had all of these baskets full of leftovers.

This church has many people in it tonight, not as many as could be in it, or we would like to see in it. But supposing it was packed, what are these among so many of this town, among so many lost people?

What are these? What are these few compared to the many? Well, here is Jesus saying to them, yes, you're weak, yes, in yourselves, you're less in number than the world, than all that unbelief that surrounds you, but put yourself and your weakness in my hand, leave it to me.

You do the serving, let him do the converting. You carry out his mandate, let him look after the results. That's where the power comes from.

[28 : 06] We're reminded this morning of the fact that it's not even in prayer that our power actually resides, it's in the spirit of God. God. And that's why every single letter here finishes with the same emphasis, he who is on here, let him hear what the spirit says to the churches.

Because that's where our resources are. In a sense, that's why Jesus died and rose again and ascended to heaven, so that he would procure the Holy Spirit for his people.

He poured this out, as Peter said, on the day of Pentecost. That's where our power lies too. And then he says, I will make them who are of the synagogue of Satan, who say they are Jews and are not, but lie, I will make them come and bow down before your feet, and they will learn that I have loved you.

Now, these were people who were Jews by birth, but not Jews spiritually, because they had not accepted Christ, and they were actually strongly opposing the gospel in Philadelphia.

That's why Jesus is saying here to his church in Philadelphia, these are Jews, say they're Jews, but they are not. They are by birth, but they're not spiritually. In fact, he says they are a synagogue of Satan, a gathering together of Satan.

[29 : 31] They're influenced by him because of the way that they so resist the gospel and resist and make such difficulty for my church in Philadelphia.

And he says, I will make them come and bow down before your feet, and they will learn that I have loved you. That may be a reference forward to the final judgment, or to some other particular event where they're going to be judged in that way by God.

But if you go back again to Isaiah and to similar passages, that are quoted from or brought from there to be used by this, in this letter, the emphasis there in Isaiah, like chapter 60, for example, is on the incoming of the Gentiles into the church through the gospel.

And the Lord says here, they are Jews and are not. The same holds in principle for them as well.

They will come and bow down before your feet and they will learn that I have loved you.

And we can take that as a reference to them coming to learn through their conversion, through their coming into the house of God, into the salvation that's in Christ. They will bow down before your feet.

[30 : 53] They will come to acknowledge that you are right, that the things that you have in the gospel are the things which are true and the things which are holy in keeping with your head. And that's why he says too, they will learn that I have loved you.

There are people out there tonight, friends, in this town who long to be loved, who long to know that they are loved, who miss the fact of being loved, who are desperate for someone to love them.

Yes, they may not want it in the terms of the gospel, but deep down in their heart, that is really the ache that's there. And you know, that's one of the great things and one of the things that we really want to see more and more of as time goes on.

People coming into this place, people coming through knowing you, through being invited by you, people coming through the influence of God's people, people coming to actually realize the love of Christ.

Christ. That's really what the world, if you like, is crying out for. Maybe it isn't at all aware of the fact, but you know when people come, as he says here, they will come and bow down before your feet of my church in Philadelphia and they will know that I have loved you.

[32 : 17] love. There are many things about God and about Jesus Christ that we need to know. Many aspects of his person, of his authority, of his power, of his holiness, many other features of this person that, of course, we need to know and that we want others to know also.

But above all things, we want them to know his love. We want them to know his love, to be captivated by his love, the love that came into this world and left behind the position that he occupied and instead took the position of a servant and in that position and in that servitude was obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.

the love that did not hold on to the status he had being God and being served, instead relinquished it in order to become a servant and stooped even to wash the feet of his disciples as an acted-out parable, if you like, of how far this saviour was going to go in serving his people, even to death, to the grave, to pay the price of sin, to take to himself what we deserved.

love of Christ. How special is that? Is it special to you?

Is there anything more special? Is there anything more wonderful? Is there anything to take hold of your heart like it?

[34 : 25] God is there to love of Jesus? Jesus, have loved you. I have loved you. That's what you want people to come to realize and come to know for themselves and for yourselves to know it more and more.

And then he goes on to speak about how he was going to keep them from the hour of trial that is coming on the whole world. And if we just skip over that fairly quickly, to hold fast what you have

that no one takes your crown.

A church under the stewardship of Jesus, a church engaged in the service of Jesus, and finally a church assured of a future security from Jesus.

To the one who conquers, 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, and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which comes down from my God out of heaven, and my own new name.

Philadelphia, as you still find in this part of the world in western Turkey, was a place well used to earthquakes. There was a massive earthquake there in AD 17, which destroyed most of the town of Philadelphia, and for years it lay in ruins.

[35 : 55] And of course when an earthquake strikes, even with modern buildings, it's very likely if it's a severe one that even very well-built buildings are going to topple.

And it's an emblem really of how insecure we are without Christ, how insecure we are even having the best of things in this life, and having all the best resources that life can give us, and having great achievements, whatever they might be.

What he's saying is, to the one who conquers, because really the Christian life is a perseverance. it's something in which you need to actually go on, step by step, day by day, bit by bit, towards the end.

But to the one who conquers, and you see it's the individual now, it's not just the whole church being addressed, it's the one, it's the individual, to the individual who conquers, because however much we may be privileged and belonging to the church, and belonging to a place like Philadelphia, however many advantages that may give us, as it does, and that is surely one of the things that comes across from this letter to Philadelphia.

What a great thing it is to actually be part of or belong to the church of God. What privileges, what advantages we have through the gospel. What resources God has given to his church.

[37 : 36] Here he says, to the one who conquers, you need to conquer, I need to conquer, I need to overcome personally, individually, and I need to use all the advantages I have in belonging to the church, to overcome individually, and so to conquer and receive the promises fulfilled that he says here, belong to those who conquer.

I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God. Now that means, of course, the spiritual temple.

What God is presently building with all his people as they come to be changed, converted, sanctified, and ultimately glorified, they are living stones, as Peter puts it in his first epistle, that God is actually using to build a spiritual temple.

What he's saying is, this is my promise to the one who overcomes. I grant eternal security.

Nothing's going to topple them.

No power on earth, in hell, in heaven, nothing whatsoever, as Paul puts it to the Romans, shall separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus, our Lord.

It just can't be done. I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God, where no earthquake will reach, literally or symbolically.

[39 : 08] And he will give him a new name, even his own new name, which elsewhere in Revelation, he says, no one knows what that new name is.

It will be revealed when he comes. But now here's the question that I want to leave with you and ask myself too. how secure is your life?

What is your life built on? What's your foundation? How is it between yourself and eternity, and judgment and death?

the only safety is in Christ, not near him, but in him.

Conquering through his name, you come to inherit these great promises that you will have all of this through of you as well.

[40 : 15] And friends, is that not why you're here tonight, that your life will be secure. Young people die.

Middle-aged people die. Old people die. We're used to seeing the sight of a coffin. And it should always awaken in us that question.

Is my life secure? If that was my body in that coffin, where would I be? Would I be safe as a pillar in the temple of my God?

Let's pray. Lord, our God, we give thanks that we have received once again of the teaching of the gospel, that teaching of your own spirit, that brings to us your own position in authority and power

and glory over us.

We thank you tonight for the security that you give to your people, for the assurance that we have, O Lord, that when we are indeed in Christ, then all is well, and that we can sing that all is well with our soul, that all is well with us in all our being.

[41 : 37] bless to us your word once again, we pray, and continue with us throughout this week, for Jesus sake, Amen. Let's conclude our service this evening singing in Psalm 67, 67 from Sing Psalms on page 84.

Sing the whole of the psalm, God be merciful and bless us, shine upon us with your face, that the earth may know your actions, and all lands your saving grace.

Through to the end of the psalm, then the land will yield its harvest, God will pour his gifts abroad, God our God will surely bless us, all the earth will fear our God.

Let's stand to sing this in conclusion. God be merciful and bless us, shine upon us with your face, grace, and the earth may know your actions, and all lands your saving grace.

Oh, God, may the people praise you, may all people sing your praise, for you judge the nations, justly, ruling over every race.

[43 : 12] May they sing with joy and gladness, may they all rejoice as one, God, may the people praise you, as they all unite in song.

When the land will yield its harvest, God will pour its gifts abroad, abroad, God our God will surely bless us, all the earth will fear our God.

Now unto him who is able to keep us from falling, and to present us before his own glory with exceeding joy, to the only wise God, our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, now and evermore.

Amen.