

THE CHURCH WITH AN OPEN DOOR

Revelation 3:7-13

Christ looked at the church in Philadelphia, noted its condition and sent it His message which is recorded in these verses. In His message to that early church are various significant things which our Lord would have us observe.

I. The Christ.

This letter begins with a description of the risen Lord. "These things saith he that is holy, he that is true, he that hath the key of David, he that openeth and no man shutteth; and shutteth, and no man openeth."

1. His Character.

Striking details of His character are as follows:

(1) Essential Deity.

Christ wanted the readers of this letter to see Him in His essential deity. "These things saith he that is holy." In the absolute sense holiness belongs to God alone. Only as God could Christ claim holiness. Christ claimed to be the Holy One. There was no darkness in Him. His character was spotless. There was never any taint of evil in Him, or any defilement on His name. None of His closest observers or worst critics could detect a single flaw in Him.

(2) Expressed Deity.

Christ wanted the readers of this letter to see Him in His expressed deity. "These things saith he that is true." Being holy in character, He was also true in conduct. As certainly as He was perfect in character, He was perfect in His conduct. Everything that He said and did always bore the mark of flawless perfection. He was genuine in every respect. All of His offers were dependable.

(3) Exercised Deity.

Christ wanted the readers of this letter to see Him in His exercised deity. "These things saith he that hath the key of David." "The key of David" symbolizes kingly authority. Christ is the one whose right it is to exercise kingly authority over individuals and churches. Our blessed Lord is the sole possessor of the key to the divine treasure house. Entrance to the marvelous blessings of God can be secured only through Him Who said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life; no man cometh unto the Father, but by me" (John 14:6). While we do not have any merit of our own by which we can claim even the least of God's mercies, the divine blessings are ours because "He hath made us accepted in the beloved" (Ephesians 1:6).

2. His Administration.

This expression, "He that openeth and no man shutteth; and shutteth, and no man openeth," refers not only to His ability, but also to His activities. He did not hold an executive position only, but He administered the work also. Christ opened the door from darkness to light, from despair to hope, from sorrow to comfort, and from the grave to resurrection and then into heaven. It is His privilege to open the door of opportunity for service before a church.

We need to remember that our Lord both opens and closes doors of opportunity for service. If we are yielded to His will, He will guide us to the place where He wants us to serve Him, and the utmost efforts of human beings to keep us out of that place will be of no avail. On the other hand, He can close the door before us even as He did with Paul when he wanted to preach in Bithynia (Acts 16:6-7).

II. The City.

Philadelphia was founded in 189 B. C. by King Attalus Philadelphus, from whom it took its name. Located on the borders of three countries, on the imperial road from Rome to the East, it occupied a very strategic position. It was a commercial city of commanding position and considerable importance. It was the center of a large wine trade, for which the surrounding area in the adjoining valley made it eminently suitable. Near Philadelphia were many hot springs, so the city became a center to which the infirm came to bathe in the medicinal waters. Into the city came people from many lands in search of healing and health, and from it there went forth an abundance of local products as the visitors returned to their homes. The city became famous as a center for heathen worship. It had so many gods and so many temples that it was sometimes called "Little Athens."

Attalus built Philadelphia with the deliberate intention of it becoming the missionary of Hellenism to the spacious and barbarous lands which stretched beyond it. He fully intended for it to function as a missionary in spreading the Greek language, way of life and civilization throughout the regions beyond.

III. The Church.

This church was weak in the estimation of men. Her members were few in number, were endowed with only a very limited amount of worldly goods, and were very insignificant in the eyes of men; but they proved their faithfulness to Christ. Because of their loyalty to Christ they brought great joy to Him and He in turn praised them highly.

IV. The Commendation.

Note some of the things for which Christ commended the members of this church.

1. For Their Works In Weakness.

"I know thy works; for thou hast a little strength." This church did not have any worldly standing. Men simply did not sing its praises. Evidently the congregation was small and weak. The world did not take note of what it was doing. Nevertheless, it was doing much with little. Even though the members did not have much strength, they cheerfully used all that they had in the service of their Lord. Small in numbers, but genuine in life, they were diligent in service for Christ. They accomplished things worthwhile for their Lord by their faithfulness to duty under trying circumstances. You may rest assured that He always sees and appreciates such faithfulness on the part of Christians in any of His churches.

2. For Their Loyalty To Christ's Word.

"Thou hast kept my word." The members of that church received the Word of the Lord, studied it, believed it and obeyed it. There were many false teachings current in their day, but the Christians in Philadelphia were not disturbed by them. They accepted the teachings of God's Word and lived in conformity to them. Oh, that we had more church members to whom God's Word is so precious that they would receive, believe, honor and obey it!

3. For Their Loyalty To Christ's Name.

Christ commended the members of that church saying, "Thou hast not denied my name." Being loyal to the Word of God, they were loyal to Christ also. Christ's person, name, word and work are inseparable. When they were brought before the heathen magistrates in those days of fiery trial and commanded to repudiate their faith in Christ, they steadfastly refused to deny His name. So loyal were they to His name that they were willing, if need be, to die as martyrs.

Some of those who opposed, hated and persecuted the members of this church were so bitter and satanic that the Master referred to them as belonging to "the synagogue of Satan." But even such sordid folk could not shake the convictions of the Christians in Philadelphia. The honor of Christ's name has been entrusted to us, so we should be loyal to it by proclaiming it to others. The strength of a church does not consist in the wealth, the wisdom or the power of its members, but in their fidelity to the name, the word and the work of Christ.

V. The Challenge.

To this body of Christian people, conscious of their insufficiency, came an inspiring challenge: "Behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it." An opened door was something that the Lord alone could give them. It was not something that any man could make. The door which Christ opened to the church was that of opportunity. In the old days it had been the function of Philadelphia to be the missionary of Hellenism to the lands beyond. Now in the fulness of time the door of opportunity was wide open to bring to the lands beyond, not the gospel of Hellenism, but the gospel of Christ. The church there was one for which the door of opportunity was swinging on its hinges.

Plenty of people in that ancient city tried to shut the door of evangelistic service in the face of the Christians, but without avail. The members of that church did not allow opposition and persecution to close that door. As always, Christ showed His appreciation of work done for Him by opening doors to yet larger service.

It is important for us to see clearly that there are two sides to our lives. One side is at the mercy of man and circumstance; its happiness, its opportunities and its privileges can be shut out from us. But there is another side to our lives. There are doors which no man can shut. There are areas of our lives which are not at the mercy of man and circumstance. The sources of our spiritual richness and resources lie in our using these inner doors that God has opened and which no man can shut.

The more one reads biography, or learns about human life, the more it is evident that here lies one of the chief differences between men. Set over against each other, for example, two powerful personalities like Paul and Napoleon. Outward circumstances treated them somewhat alike. They both came from obscure beginnings which were not likely to issue in such resounding consequences; they both rose to tremendous influence; and they both landed in prison. But there the similarity ends. Go to Napoleon on St. Helena. All the doors that man and circumstance could shut were closed to him. There was not a door through which he could go out and come in, not one. It was a sad story indeed. But step from that to Paul's imprisonment. All the doors that man and circumstance could shut were closed to him. But there were doors which no man could shut. Nero had a long arm, but there were doors in Paul's life that Nero could not touch.

Few passages of scripture are more admirably fitted to give encouragement and direction to those who are distressed than this one. We do not want to be slaves of circumstance. We do not want to be at the mercy of men. We want inward resources that man and circumstance cannot touch. God opens wide the door of opportunity for us. Do we have sufficient faith, vision and courage to respond to this challenge?

Among the doors that are opened for us as individuals are the following:

1. The Door Of Salvation.

Christ said, "I am the door. By me, if any man enter in, he shall be saved." This is the door of escape from the wrath of God, from the guilt and pollution of sin, from the fear of man and from the tyranny of self. This open door of mercy is before us. We do not have to go about to find it. Neither do we have to search for keys to open it, nor for instruments to break it down. Christ has set before us a door opened, and no enemy of our souls has the power to shut it. Nothing can do that except our own wills.

2. The Door Of Spiritual Growth.

The privilege of being taught of God is open to each of us. "If any man lack wisdom, let him ask of God, who giveth to all men liberally and upbraideth not." Spiritual growth is impossible without prayer. Others have won great victories through prayer. The same door by which they entered into triumph and fulness of blessing is open to you.

No one can prevent you from living in the companionship of high thoughts. We all live in the world of the thoughts we think. Phillips Brooks struck a true note when he said, "Sad will be the day for any man when he becomes contented with the thoughts he is thinking and the deeds he is doing; when there is not beating at the doors of his soul some great desire to do something larger which he knows he was meant and made to do."

3. The Door Of Service.

Christ opens the door into a larger and nobler sphere of activity. If we will exert what strength we have for the Lord, He will give us a larger place.

In George MacDonald's novel, Robert Falconer, after feeding his soul on ashes until he was in despair, went to his box and took out the Bible that his mother had given him before he left home, and said, "Now I must find standing-ground." He proceeded to read over the life and words of Christ, having all the time a piece of paper by his side and a pencil in his hand, intending to write down the great foundation truths which he found there. These were the three which he wrote down: "First, that a man's business is to do the will of God; second, that God takes upon Himself the care of man; and third, therefore that a man must never be afraid of anything." I wish that all of us would learn that lesson. Christ has set before you an open door; if you will go straight through that door in obedience to Him, He will take care of your future.

To our church, like the one in Philadelphia, Christ has opened the door of opportunity for service by proclaiming the glorious gospel. Every member of the church is obligated to be a witness for Christ. Every time that we enter a door which the Lord opens for us we shall have the joy of being successful and useful. Christ said, "Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God." A pillar supports something. The word "pillar" conveys the idea of steadfastness or constancy. A pillar is always in its place. One who is a pillar does not support his church on Sunday only.