

The Carols (III): O Come, O Come Emmanuel

Isaiah 22.20ff; The Revelation 3.7-13

December 13, 2020

Then it will come about in that day, That I will summon My servant Eliakim the son of Hilkiah,²¹ And I will clothe him with your tunic and tie your sash securely about him. I will entrust him with your authority, and he will become a father to the inhabitants of Jerusalem and to the house of Judah.²² "Then I will set the key of the house of David on his shoulder, when he opens no one will shut, when he shuts no one will open."²³ "I will drive him like a peg in a firm place, and he will become a throne of glory to his father's house.

²⁴ "So they will hang on him all the glory of his father's house, offspring and issue, all the least of vessels, from bowls to all the jars."²⁵ "In that day," declares the LORD of hosts, "the peg driven in a firm place will give way; it will even break off and fall, and the load hanging on it will be cut off, for the LORD has spoken."

Revelation 3 *And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write:*

He who is holy, who is true, who has the key of David, who opens and no one will shut, and who shuts and no one opens, says this:

⁸ 'I know your deeds. Behold, I have put before you an open door which no one can shut, because you have a little power, and have kept My word, and have not denied My name.'⁹ 'Behold, I will cause those of the synagogue of Satan, who say that they are Jews and are not, but lie-- I will make them come and bow down at your feet, and make them know that I have loved you.'¹⁰ 'Because you have kept the word of My perseverance, I also will keep you from the hour of testing, that hour which is about to come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth.'¹¹ 'I am coming quickly; hold fast what you have, so that no one will take your crown.'¹² 'He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he will not go out from it anymore; 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 out of heaven from My God, and My new name.'¹³ 'He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.'

We've been looking at Christmas Carols for a few weeks... and some of the background to these great songs the Church has sung for hundreds of years. The last two carols were from the 4th and 5th centuries... This one is much newer... from the 8th or 9th Century. Christians have been chanting this song for a mere 1200 years... like five times as old as this nation.

"Veni, Veni, Emmanuel" is the original title in Latin... and we know it as "O Come, O Come Emmanuel"... it draws on a number of OT scriptures in the lyrics...

It's a hymn of longing – a sad people in lonely exile pleading for release and yet joyous at the prospect because they know their Rescuer is coming (Advent!).

I want to look at one phrase in the last verse,

"O Come Thou key of David come and open wide our heavenly home"

It comes from a lesser-known passage in the Hebrew Prophets and it's picked up again in the last book of the Bible – a promise (700BC) and its fulfillment.

Let's look at:

#1 – The Key of David as Promise and Fulfillment

#2 – The Key as Comparison and Contrast

#3 – The Key as Way in and Way Forward

The first text is a pronouncement of woe... Isaiah, (700 BC) is denouncing/firing a corrupt government official named Shebna.

He was apparently the Prime Minister of Judah during a time when the nation was facing a crisis and was on the brink of collapse... And this Shebna was very, very busy ... busy... using his position for personal gain!

He was using government money and government labor to build a family mausoleum in the mountains ... the Egyptian kings built their pyramids and Shebna thought he should have a monument too. But it was evil! AND even worse because this was no time to be fooling around ...a lot to be done – a national crisis was brewing.

So the decree of woe was God's promise to remove this bad official and give his position to an UPRIGHT public servant named Eliakim ("God sets up/God establishes")

And this new prime minister would be all that a government official should be... he'd be a huge benefit to the people he served.

He would be (v. 21) "a father" to the people of Jerusalem. It's not just a job for him - Eliakim has compassion for the people; he's genuinely interested in their welfare.

AND he's not only clothed with the authority of the old prime minister but he has divine sanction i.e. God will put the "key of the house of David" on this man's shoulders" – he'll be the ultimate gatekeeper over the entire government of Israel. He'll be the one who grants access to the king or forbids access, who opens the doors or shuts them. No one will be able to second-guess his decisions.

HE GRANTS OPPORTUNITY and
HE BLOCKS OPORTUNITY.

AND the God who graciously takes out the bad ruler and puts IN the good ruler, will also establish Eliakim and make him remarkably dependable ("God Establishes").

God will drive him like a PEG into the wall and people will be able to rely on him for support. In fact, people will look to him as the fulfillment of God's promises to David... as if this is thĒ king,

thĒ Son of David, for whom we’ve been waiting and who will govern/protect all the people, ALL VESSELS great and small: “We’ll all hang our destiny on this peg, Eliakim, the man God set up.”

AND when the people DO rely on this good and trustworthy man, this stalwart, rock-solid peg in the wall...when everyone puts all their weight on this good man... he will break. That reliable hook in the wall can only hold so much because ... after all, (you know what we say), “After all, he’s only human.”

“Great governor...competent, dependable... but one man can only do SO much; after all, he’s only human.”

Now the fulfillment of this promise: some 700 years after Isaiah issued this omen of woe, came the BIRTH of Immanuel... After His life, death and resurrection...a network of churches was established (in what we now call Turkey). And these young churches were some of the first congregations to believe in and to ORGANIZE themselves around the Gospel (the basic Christian message).

AND the final book of the Bible begins with a series of letters to these seven churches. The church in one of these cities, the church in Philadelphia, was struggling; not a very strong/large church, a good church but one facing a lot of opposition.

Some of the members of this church were Jewish and yet when they began to believe in this Rabbi from Nazareth... they were excluded from the synagogue because “YOU’RE NO LONGER TRULY JEWISH – like we are!!”

AND... as with each of the letters to the seven churches in Asia Minor, THIS letter in Revelation begins with a description of the Author, the LORD of the congregations.

The Author describes Himself here in the imagery of Isaiah CH. 22 – that description of Eliakim, the dependable prime minister:

“(Jesus Christ) who is holy and true, who has the key of David, who opens and no one will shut and who shuts and no one opens...”

This church is one of only two churches (in seven) that get no reprimand... The letter is aimed solely at encouraging and strengthening this congregation-under-fire... and the Lord of the congregations chooses this picture to build up this congregation.

So ...what is it that they would find so uplifting in this obscure image, “the key of David”?

Well, the image is effective as both comparison AND contrast.

That's to say, this congregation in the ancient city of brotherly love (where they were not FINDING a lot of brotherly love!) this congregation had fallen into the hands of a Ruler who is BOTH LIKE the prime-minister (Eliakim) and who (in other ways) is UNLIKE him (and both ways are encouraging).

Like him, this new Prime-Minister, Jesus Christ, the Lord of the Church, is endowed with divine sanction... as Eliakim was clothed with these royal vestments and authorized to reign... SO, THE BOOK OF REVELATION pictures Jesus Christ dressed in the attire of a King... (1.13) ... and ...

Like Eliakim this new Ruler, governs from the heart, like as a Father, He's not a hired hand but a true Shepherd (John 10.11-13)... He comes in a time of crisis like the ancient prime-minister... to save his own from Satan's tyranny...

People will look to Him when He comes and be attracted to His reliability... the poor and the rich will be drawn to Him... vessels great and small will hold on to Him, the One dependable hook that will not give way... they will all say, "FINALLY, a leader we can trust completely, a reliable Peg in a firm place... never has a man spoken as He speaks... not like our leaders or the clergymen but as One with authority"

BUT of all the parallels between Isaiah's prime-minister and Jesus Christ, the one central similarity and the REASON why this "KEY" IMAGE is used is the whole idea of ACCESS... that's what a key offers!

Like old Eliakim, this new Ruler alone grants access into the presence of THE King... He opens the door and no one can shut it... He shuts the door no one can open.

On the one hand – great news: there's a way in! On the other hand (especially in our pluralistic society) – this is a terribly offensive claim – that there's ONLY ONE way IN!

HE SHOULDERS the burden of access – he was the sole gatekeeper. It all came down to him: who gets IN to the king and who is excluded.

SO, in the ultimate sense, Jesus Christ, the Master of the congregations OPENS and SHUTS – He shoulders the burden, He decides, He has the Key of David. He's the watershed; it all hangs on HIM.

Now, there are also points of contrast between the old prime minister and the New.

This letter in Revelation begins with the words, "He who is holy and true" – those are descriptions of the divine ... It's a way of saying all who have come before Me are in a class... every leader, every guru, religious teacher, every philosopher and spiritual guide OF THEM ALL, YOU HAVE HAD TO SAY, "After all, he's only human".

But this One is “the holy” i.e. IN A CLASS OF HIS OWN...unique...God with us (Immanuel) He’s divine; this could not be said of Eliakim or anyone else.

He is “The Holy and the TRUE”: a contrast with the old prime minister. Israel was said to be “the Vine” (Isa 5 et al) but when Jesus Christ comes, He says, “I am the TRUE vine.” (John 15)

I am the TRUE Prime-Minister – all others were a mixture of good qualities and bad: I AM THE TRUE VINE and I AM THE TRUE/HOLY Gate-Keeper.

Eliakim was a great ruler but not completely TRUE/perfect ... It’s another point of contrast.

AND now we come to that one quality in the old prime minister that has some correspondence with the NEW ... but is sort-of BOTH similar AND dissimilar i.e. the BREAKING OFF of the Peg.

See Eliakim was basically a faithful man, not perfect but in an age when you could scarcely FIND a faithful man... everyone flocked to him and everyone TRUSTED HIM ... the great and the small relied on him and... he broke... couldn’t bear the weight... couldn’t possibly make good on all his campaign promises... “After all, he’s only human.”

But thĒ “holy and true” PM was also the Peg hammered into a firm place and all those disciples (vessels great and small) went to Him hanging all their hopes on Him and then...HE TOO WAS CUT OFF.

But whereas Eliakim’s fall led to disappointment and the end of the open door - Jesus Christ’s death was the start of the open door and the Key to real satisfaction... and Resurrection.

He takes to Himself the sins of the great and small... everyone who trusts Him. And in His death, He pays for those sins. And whoever hangs on Him is declared forgiven and righteous in the sight of God. His life and death is our access...opens the door.

Now, you may be thinking, “Well, this is all relatively interesting but the claim of exclusivity is offensive at least and even toxic because it paves the way for bigotry and even violence – “we’re right and you’re wrong – our way is the only way!” Arrogant!

Well, an arrogant Christian is a contradiction in terms. The Christian is a person who says, “I don’t have what it takes... My life doesn’t measure up! I have NO RIGHT to be accepted by God – I’m a moral and spiritual failure... But I was granted access due to the work of Someone else.”

And this deserving Person was promised for thousands of years and did actually come and DO something for me that I couldn’t do for myself. He opened the door I couldn’t open. He lived and

I'm credited with His good life... and He died to pay for my failings. It was a historical event NOT a personal achievement.

If I claim to have access to God – it's not that I'm better than you are – it's that God came among us as Immanuel (God with us) and ransomed captive Israel.

It's not an exclusive club! In fact the LAST thing I want to do is exclude anyone. Just as Eliakim helped the great and small – so Jesus Christ offers Himself to the rich and poor, the ignorant and the educated – all classes, races, ages, genders, affiliations – all are welcomed – all are offered access. The Key of David has opened wide our heavenly home.

The only thing required to GET this access is something each one of us has in abundance i.e. failure. When you face that and realize that IT'S YOUR moral flaws and selfishness that excludes you from access to God – then you're ready for the Key.

The people in the synagogue in ancient Philadelphia ignored this. They thought they were good and they missed the distinctive idea in the religion of Abraham – that access to God is only granted to the Perfect... AND that only ONE perfect Human Being has ever lived. HE IS OUR ACCESS (Eph 2.18, 3.12) – He is the way in to those banished and in lonely exile.

And to the many morally failed Christians out there: I want to remind you that we will ALWAYS and ONLY be dependent on Him – Jesus Christ the Key of David.

Our progress and stability in the spiritual life always hangs on this Peg. We continue in the Way we first got access – faith and repentance!

He's the Key, (v.10) "you have kept the word of MY perseverance" At the center of church life in this successful Philadelphia church is the fact that Jesus Christ persevered... (That was their story and they were sticking TO it!)

They were beautifully hanging... not on their little power (v.8) but on His BIG power... They were not great achievers but great repenters and believers. They saw Him as the Way In AND the Way Forward.

The open door always depends on Him. We'll persevere only by knowing to Whom we belong (the One who stamps His New Name on us and claims us) – we persevere only as we continue to rely on Him.

"Whoever has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."