

My wife was telling me the other day about a porcelain tea set... which used to be her grandmother's. Patti has inherited it... and apparently it is very ornate. I say apparently... because I don't recall ever seeing it. She told me that it was packed away in one of the cabinets of our kitchen... waiting to be inherited by one of our daughters.

I am certain that the tea set was treasured by her grandmother... and I know that Patti's mom cherished it as well. Patti now has joy of knowing that this fragile piece of art is in her possession. But *there it sits*... carefully wrapped and boxed... tucked away in the back of our cabinet. The paint that was used on it is lead-based – so there will never be an opportunity for it to be used in the manner for which it was made.

We have been studying the seven letters to the seven churches that are found in chapters 2 and 3 of the book of Revelation. *All but one* of the five letters that we have examined so far... were warnings to their churches... that they could be packed up and tucked away... like Patti's tea set... Having the appearance of beauty and usefulness... but given no opportunity to be used.

But the letter of our study this morning is different. The Church of Philadelphia is not given any condemnation... and is only commended... Jesus tells them that He will give them more opportunities.

As I have reminded you with each letter... John was given a three-fold outline of the book of Revelation that he was told to write... Revelation 1:19 says... "*write therefore the things that you have seen*" (and he had seen the image of Christ standing before him)... "*the things that are*" (in other words the existing church and its entirety through the ages)... But

the church will not continue to exist on earth forever... so John was also told to write)... “*and those that are to take place...*” (the events that will occur after the church age... which are the very events of the tribulation... which we will get to in chapter 4 onward...)

The church age... in it's entirety is represented by seven letters to seven churches. (The number seven represents completeness... and these seven churches represent the complete history of the church from Pentecost... when the church began... to it's end at the rapture.)

We have been seeing... in each of these letters a prophetic dual fulfillment. You see... John was addressing specific contemporary situations in each church... They were current to John's own day... when he penned them... But also (just as Old Testament prophecy often did)... these letter prophecies clearly relate to future events as well...

When we studied the letter to the church at Ephesus... we saw that it had a strong parallel between the literal church in Ephesus during John's day... AND the church period from Pentecost to around 100 A.D. (when the next church age began.) ... Both had patiently endured hardship... defended God's truth against false teachers... worked sacrificially... but eventually only did ministry out of a sense of duty. (They had lost their first love for Jesus)... and they were warned that if they did not repent... Jesus would remove their witness to the world... ... Today... when we look to the entire region where Ephesus had once thrived... their testimony has been extinguished. It is a Muslim land today.

Then we studied the letter to the church at Smyrna... which amazingly paralleled the period of church history from 100 A.D. to 312 A.D. ... The

Church of Smyrna is the church under persecution. The letter said there would be ten periods of testing... and when the time came from 100 A.D. through 312 A.D. the church had never known (previously... or since then...) such severe persecution. During that time period... 10 separate Roman Emperors tried to extinguish the church. But it eventually ended.

Next... we looked at the letter to the church at Pergamum. This represents the church period from 312... to approximately A.D. 590... Beginning in 312... Emperor Constantine not only made Christianity legal... but forced his armies and induced much of Roman society to convert to Christianity. ... He was allowed to take over and to preside over the church as it's leader... and so in this period of church history... we see the Church marry the world... (The word Pergamum means "to marry.")

Then we studied the letter to the church at Thyratira. This parallels the period of church history from 590 – 1517... when the church tolerated a person identified as Jezebel. Jezebel led the church into idolatry and depreciating the person of Christ. There are many parallels to the development of the system of Catholicism and the contemporary church at Thratira. The word Thyratira mean continual sacrifice... which was developed during this historical period as the church developed the unbiblical concept of mass (where Jesus is sacrificed every time mass is celebrated.)

Last week... it was the letter to Sardis.

The word Sardis means "escaping ones," or "those who come out." The period in the history of Christendom suggested here is the Reformation period from about A.D. 1517 to A.D. 1750. In the midst of spiritual darkness

there were those who escaped its contamination. ... Among those who "escaped" or "came out" were Luther... Knox... Wycliffe... Zwingli... and others. ... These were the great reformers who broke with Rome. Jesus said of this church... (or period of church history)... that they had the reputation of being alive... but they were actually dead. Christ described the dead orthodoxy... where adherence to creeds and doctrinal positions were far more primary than outreach... forgiveness... and loving behavior. Cold... hard orthodoxy became the norm.

This brings us to today's letter... to the Church at Philadelphia.

Most of you probably already know that the word "Philadelphia" means "brotherly love"... (coming from two words... "Philos"... meaning "love" and "delphoi" meaning "brothers.") ... We have been seeing how the names of each of these churches have played a significant part... in describing what their corresponding period of church history would be like.

The period of church history that we looked at last week was characterized by their lack of love – they were dead... with only head-knowledge. Christianity had become cold... formalistic... and lifeless. ... But the Lord brought change in the next church period... between the years of 1730 to about 1950.

The Lord at this time brought about a great revival. This revival centered largely the within United States, England, Scotland and Wales, and was the beginning of the greatest Missionary movement of all times. The great missionary movements were in full swing. No one could ever stop the forward movement of the gospel when the Church took advantage of the open door to service.

God called men like George Whitefield, Charles Wesley, Charles Finney, D. L. Moody, Billy Sunday... and many others to proclaim His word. The second coming, was being preached everywhere. People were being saved and looking for the Savior to appear at any moment. Being aware of Christ's possible return at any moment, they occupied themselves with the defense of the faith and preaching of the gospel... with self-sacrificing love.

I was born into the glowing embers of this Church era... as it faded. But some of you who are here... lived a large part of your lives in it. I appreciate hearing your memories of church experiences when the Philadelphia Church Era was in full swing. It was a time when there was great missionary expansion... God was opening impossible doors of effective service... and church folks had a great love for one another.

Even though we are no longer part of that era... we are now in the Laodicean Church age... there can (and are) elements of it... that will live on... to the time that the church is raptured off the earth. There are remnants of each major period... that continue to exist. These descriptions depict the normal (or the most characteristic) patterns and behaviors of the majority of the churches in each time period. One of the promises that are made to the Church at Philadelphia (we are about to see) is highly suggestive that there will be some Philadelphia-like churches at the time of the rapture.

I don't think that it would be hard at all to build the case that Living Water is a unique church to our Era. ... I believe that we are a "Philadelphian Church... living in the Laodicea Church Age." Maybe you will agree...

Revelation 3:7-13

The purpose of this city was to be a mission outpost for the spreading of the Greek culture throughout the regions of Lydia and Phrygia which is in the region of Turkey today. It was located at the place where the borders of three countries met.... Mysia, Phrygia, and Lydia. This made Philadelphia the *Gateway to the East* and a strategic location for being a Hellenizing mission outpost... for making Greek culture dominant. The city succeeded in its mission so well that by 19 A.D., the Lydian language had been completely replaced by the Greek language. They were not as successful with the Phrygians who resisted the changes from the West. The location of the city of Philadelphia gave it natural opportunity (open doors) for successful Hellenization of the land.

The only major problem with the location... was that the area was prone to earthquakes. ... Philadelphia sat on a geological fault... and in 17 B.C. it was destroyed by a severe earthquake that also destroyed Sardis and ten other cities. ... Afterward... many of the citizens remained fearful... and refused to move back into the city. ... There did not seem to be much security in the city of brotherly love! ... They were few... and their potential for greatness was weakened by their multiple earthquakes.

Revelation 3:7

The background for our understanding what is said here... is found in Isaiah chapter 22. ... Assyria had invaded Judah (as Isaiah had warned), but the Jewish leaders were trusting Egypt, not God, to deliver the nation. One of the treacherous leaders was a man named Shebna who had used his office, not for the good of the people, but for his own private gain. God

saw to it that Shebna was removed from office and that a faithful man, Eliakim, was put in his place and given the keys of authority.

Isaiah 22:15-25

Eliakim was a picture of Jesus Christ... (a dependable administrator of the affairs of God's people.) Indeed Jesus was (and is) the King of the Jews. The key to the house of David is His. By law, by lineage and by the eternal will of God, Jesus is the heir to the earthly, visible, actual throne of David.

Until Jesus comes back... and establishes His Kingdom... reigning from Jerusalem... God's chosen people can have no true head. Christ alone has the keys to David's house and when He shuts it... no man can open.

He is the Keeper of the Keys. He has the keys to the Kingdom of Heaven, the keys to God's presence, the keys to eternal life, the keys to the storehouse of divine truth, the keys to heaven. He has the keys to all our circumstances.

He has the keys to the doors of Christian service. ... He says to the saints in Philadelphia:

Revelation 3:8

In the New Testament, an "open door" speaks of opportunity for ministry (Acts 14:27... 1 Cor 16:9... 2 Cor 2:12... and Col 4:3). ... It depicts the fact that it is Christ Who determines where and when His people shall effectively serve.

As followers of Christ... who want to serve Him effectively... we tempted to pull wires and do a little "politicking" and we try to slap backs and "know the

right people” and “make contacts” in order to ensure effective ministry. ... But the only proper promotion comes not from the south, east or west, but from God... ... And if we commit our way unto Him and trust Him... He will bring it to pass.

No man or group of men hold the keys to Christian service. The Lord is still in charge and His eyes run to and fro throughout the whole earth to show Himself strong on the behalf of those whose heart is perfect toward Him. His headquarters is heaven and His itinerary is made up by the Lord of the Open Door.

Paul spoke of open doors in Ephesus and in Macedonia. ... Our current era of church history (the ear of Laodicea) is the Church of the Closed Door. Foreign fields are closing and missionaries are denied visas for entry. They have to come up with all sorts of creative ways to get into much of the world today... especially the Muslim countries... and even Europe! ... But Philadelphia was the Church of the Open Door.

Between the resurrection and Pentecost we read that the disciples were “behind closed doors for fear of the Jews.” ... Much of the Laodicean church (of today)... is behind closed doors for fear today — and has lost opportunities in places like China and elsewhere. ... It is a day of closed doors... but our Lord is the Christ of the Open Door. ... When a church (even one that lives in the Laodicean era)... repents and obeys Him... Christ opens doors... just as Living Water has seen... down in Colombia over the past five years!

Christ has set before us an open door... and it remains opened to this day. We must realize that the door of opportunity to preach the gospel carries with it great responsibility. When Jesus Christ opens a door for us, we must go through it. We must busy ourselves with His work, for the day will come when the door will be closed.

It is also interesting that Jesus prefaced His open door promise with the statement, **I know your works**. This is important! God never gives us greater opportunities, until we are faithful to use what He has already given us. ... Because of their faithful use of God's Word... Christ would open doors for them that no one could shut.

God will make a way for any Christian or church that applies His Word... and honors His Name. ... But let's be very careful here... and not misunderstand this as some sort of remuneration... because of our ability... faith... or works. It seems to me that the nature of the relationship... between the faithfulness in the church in Philadelphia... and the open door... is **not** one of their *earning* an open door... but one of the power of the word of Jesus... *producing* an open door. ... That is, Jesus does not give the church an open door as a payment... in response to the service they rendered by keeping His word. Rather... Jesus gives them His word... which is living and active... powerful... life-giving... opportunity creating... and when they properly use it... the word of Jesus opens doors.

It is not a matter of our great strength... or our great ability... but the great **dependability**... of God's Word... and the Person of Christ. ... It is not the size or strength of a church that determines its ministry... but the application of His Word.. and desire to see the Name of Christ honored!

The Lord does not blame us for having little strength... but for having little regard for His Name and His Word. The church at Philadelphia had kept His Word. This means they received the Word, they believed the Word, they loved the Word, and they obeyed the Word. To them God's Word was a treasure, a holy thing, thus they kept and guarded it, even under great disadvantages. The church at Philadelphia also sought to have the Name of Christ honored by all people through missionary outreach.

Right after telling the believers that He had opened a door for them, He then says they have "*little power.*" That emphasis on the saints' condition helps them to look to Him for strength to help in serving Him and in entering the open door. It is not our power that is important; it is His power and strength that matters. He will keep the door open. He will enable us to serve. Look not at your own strength—that can be very discouraging—but look at His strength. Be sure of your calling, then let Him take care of the needed power.

We can have all the education available, the best of programs, the most appealing literature, and put on great evangelistic meetings, but apart from Christ opening the door of opportunity, we will fail most miserably.

Revelation 3:9

Just because Christ opens a door... does not mean that our walking through it will be easy. Verse eight mentioned an obstacle that keeps many from going through... and that was having little power in themselves. Verse 9 gives us a different one – human opponents. To the first century church at Philadelphia... they faced opposition from ethnic Jews.

These people may have been Jews in the flesh... but they were not "true Israel" in the New Testament sense. (Paul argued in Romans 2:17-29 that a person becomes a Jew by believing God's promises... not by birth... and that Christians (because they believe God's promises) are true descendants of Abraham.

How were these Jews (by birth only) opposing the church at Philadelphia? For one thing, by excluding Jewish believers from the synagogue. Another weapon was probably false accusation, for this is the way the unbelieving Jews often attacked Paul. Satan is the accuser and he uses even religious people to assist him. It is not easy to witness for Christ when the leading people in the community are spreading lies about you.

Anyone who has found themselves persecuted because of righteousness, opposed because of the gospel, can be encouraged by what Jesus says here to the church in Philadelphia. Jesus tells this church that keeping his word is not only the path that leads to the open door, it is also the path that leads to triumph over the enemies of the gospel.

"I will make them to come and bow down before your feet, and they will learn that I have loved you". ... Some of their condemnation will be seen in their worship of Christ.

First, the practice of worship. *"I will make them to come and bow down."* Paul said, *"Every knee should bow... every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord"* (Phil 2:11). Some will bow and confess to their salvation. Others to their damnation. It depends on when you bow—before or after

death. These pretenders will ultimately have to acknowledge Christ as Lord, but to their condemnation.

Second, the place of worship. "*before your feet.*" They are not worshipping the faithful but will do it before the faithful which acknowledges that the faithful were right. Condemnation shames.

Third, the praise in worship. "*They will learn that I have loved you.*" Those who were despised in this world will be acknowledged and praised by the fakers as being right. The ungodly, to their shameful condemnation, will one day recognize that believers were the ones who were right. The day is coming when the Lord will show what is right and who is right.

(LISTEN! Can you honestly say you agree with this...?) ... "The greatest friend of truth is time." Error is always in a hurry, but God's man can afford to await the vindication of time. And if he is not vindicated in his own lifetime, eternity will settle the score.

Revelation 3:10

This is one of the clearest statements that true believers will not go through the Tribulation... This is a precious promise for the believer. It is a reference to the blessed hope—that God's children will be delivered from and kept out of the tribulation that is yet to come upon the unbelieving world. The Church will not go through the tribulation. At some appointed day... just before the tribulation... Christ will rapture His people from this sin darkened earth.

I read with interest (this week) several commentaries that were written by men... who I know believe that Christians **will** go through the tribulation. (I

wanted to read how they handle the well-defined teaching of this verse.) ... They either simply denied it... or wrote something to the effect of: "Believers will go through the tribulation, because the Anti-Christ will murder saints... So the church will still be here..." ... But what they do not consider is that once the rapture occurs... those who we have witnessed to... (but they resisted)... will see that what we said was true. The rapture is going to convince a lot of people who are skeptics today. It will be too late for them to be raptured... but not too late for them to show their faith by not taking the Mark of the Beast... and then suffering martyrdom for it. ... So I say "Hogwash! This text is very clear... and there is no reason to deny what it plainly says... (both contextually and grammatically.)"

Contextually: We not only have an open door of salvation and service, but also of safe deliverance from the Great Tribulation.

Grammatically: In the Greek language, the word "keep from" is tereo ek. The word ek means "from, out from, away from." If the Lord intended that the Church go through the Tribulation, the Greek preposition en which means "in" or dia which means "through" would have been the appropriate word to use. The words tereo ek mean "continuous existence outside."

Revelation 3:11

If ever our souls need to be on guard... it is today. The temper of the times demands it. The world is chloroformed by the prince of darkness and Christians slumber in spiritual stupor. Our natures demand it. We are lazy and inclined to float downstream instead of to swim against the current. Forgetting the things which we have heard we drift away from them. The heart must be broken up and sown with good seed and cultivated if there is

to be a good harvest; but we are disposed to let the weeds grow. And some have so interpreted the grace of God as to minimize our personal responsibility to watch and pray lest we enter into temptation.

Our crown can be stolen by discouragement. There are human wet-blankets who have never felt God's power in their own lives and discredit it in others. Elijah and John the Baptist were two most rugged characters but discouragement overcame them. If we would run well the race we must be immune to the peril of low spirits on one hand and high spirits on the other and let neither depth nor height steal our crown.

Success can do it. We must let heaven and not earth reward us. The king of Sodom must not boast that he has made Abram rich. Many a prophet has been promoted into silence. Success can feather our nest so comfortably that we forget how to fly. Abraham's servant, when tempted to stay a while at the home of the wife he had found for Isaac, said, "Hinder me not, seeing the Lord hath prospered my way...." If God has prospered your way, you had better be on your way!

Men can steal our crown by entangling us with so many concerns that the good crowds out the best. A multitude of small religious activities can so absorb us that we lose our crown in a whirl of glorified piddling.

If we will continue to be a Philadelphia church in a Laodicean age... then we simply must be on our guard against the dull... draining atmosphere of the world around us.... And not allow our crown to be stolen.

Revelation 3:12

The symbolism in this verse would be especially meaningful to people who lived in constant danger of earthquakes: the stability of the pillar, no need to go out or to flee, a heavenly city that nothing could destroy. Ancient cities often honored great leaders by erecting pillars with their names inscribed on them. God's pillars are not made of stone... His pillars are faithful people who bear His name for His glory. ... He will make those who follow Him strong, stable, immovable, permanent, durable, and standing in God's house.

Pillars also represented honor. In pagan temples they were often carved in such a way to honor a particular deity. Philadelphia could relate to the honor of a pillar. ... It was their custom to honor a man who served the city well as a magistrate, benefactor, or priest by erecting a pillar in a temple with his name on it. ... His name would be remembered by the worshipers in the temple. ... Jesus said, "I will make a pillar for you in my temple. I will honor you."

He will write the name of God... and the place of our eternal dwelling on the overcomer. ... All of this will give the overcomer much prestige/honor... something we do not have on earth.

God will not do this for the treasured tea pots that are boxed up and sitting in kitchen cabinet. No... God is looking for weak vessels... clay pots... the kind that can be filled with His power and His strength... and then be sent out into a crash-bang world... walking through the doors that He will open.

Let's be a Philadelphia Church in the Laodicean Age!

Revelation 3:13