



Sermon-Based Study Guide
Good Shepherd Presbyterian Church

Revelation 3.7-13

Prepared by Curtis A. Bronzan
curtis@gspc.org | 562/493.2553 x115

I. Introduction to this Study

This week we're engaging the Risen Jesus' sixth blog (of seven), written to the church in Philadelphia, a city that lay on the border of three countries: Mysia, Lydia, and Phrygia. Because of its geographical location and proximity to one of the greatest highways in the ancient world, Philadelphia had been founded "with the deliberate intention that it might become a missionary city" for Greek culture. As we will see, the Risen Christ invites the Christians of Philadelphia to develop an "open door policy," spreading the good news of God's Kingdom from Europe into Asia.

II. Connecting with One Another

Think of an opportunity you've had, or currently have. What was it? How did you engage it?

III. Study the Text

a. Read Revelation 3.7-13.

Take some time to think through the different images presented in these verses. Do you see any similar phrases or concepts seen in previous blogs to Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, or Sardis? If you have time, reread these messages to the previous five churches.

What questions do you have after reading this passage for the first time?

b. Reread Revelation 3.7-8. This phrase is almost certainly inspired by the prophecy in Isaiah 22.22, which includes references to the key, the robe, and the sash, each a symbol of power and authority (see another possible reference in Isaiah 45.1).

How do you think Jesus is repurposing this phrase "What he opens no one can shut, and what he shuts no one can open"? What is the door being referenced?

c. Read John 10.1-10. How does this imagery "open up" your understanding of a door (or in this case, a gate) being open?

In the first century, many Jews found themselves shut out of the synagogue when they became convinced that Jesus was the Messiah. How would this metaphor bring them comfort of being cut off from family, friends and their former community of faith?

d. William Barclay writes, "In the ancient sheepfold there was no gate or door; there was only an opening in the wall through which the sheep passed. When the sheep were all gathered within the fold the shepherd himself lay down across the opening, so that none could get in or out except over him. The shepherd was literally the door. So then Jesus is to us the door to God; through Him we enter in."

This imagery of "the gate" may be used again in Revelation 21.22-27. Some have conjectured that this implies the possibility of someone being saved by Jesus *after* they've died, in the new heaven and new earth. What do you think?

e. Other "open door" connections are seen in the Apostle Paul's letters and the book of Acts. See 1st Corinthians 16.9, 2nd Corinthians 2.12, Colossians 4.3, and Acts 14.27.

How is “open door” used in these passages? How is it different from the use engaged above? How are these two uses connected?

- f. “I know you have little strength” in verse 8 probably refers to the Philadelphian church being small, and as such, unable “to open such metaphysical doors with their own resources.” Yet, they had kept God’s Word and not denied His name. This concept of naming comes up again in verse 12, and may build on the historical renaming of Philadelphia after Roman rulers, which occurred twice!

What does it mean for us to not deny God’s name? What does it mean for us to “keep God’s Word”?

- g. Read Revelation 3.9-10.

Chances are that these verses allude to Isaiah 60.13-14 and Isaiah 49.22-23. Read these passages before going on. How do you understand these verses? How would Revelation 3.9-10 alter the meaning of these verses?

One biblical commentator notes, “The ironical use of this motif is clear: in all these passages the Gentiles are expected to grovel before Israel, while in Revelation 3.9 it is the Jews who are expected to grovel before the feet of this (largely gentile) Christian community.” This expression of homage and honor is flipped! (see also Zechariah 8.20-23)

Lest we allow this verse to influence our understanding of our Jewish ancestors, however, let us remember the context: This great reversal will occur for a particular church and the particular folks in first-century Philadelphia who were persecuting them.

- h. The notion of “love” in verse 9’s “I have loved you” conveys not primarily affection, but rather election. Why is this important in light of the “open door” discussed above?
- i. Theories abound regarding the end of the world and interpretation of the book of Revelation. While other perspectives exist, what does verse 10 imply regarding whether Christians will be present for a future time of trial and testing?
- j. Read Revelation 3.11-13.

To take away someone’s crown (literally “wreath”) is a metaphor for being disqualified in a contest. It’s been noted that “the way this exhortation is phrased suggests that the Philadelphians already have their crowns but must take care that no one take them away.”

How could someone take away another person’s crown!? Is that possible? If so, how?

- k. Verse 12 returns to architectural imagery. Note other temple imagery used for the Christian community in 1st Corinthians 3.16-17, 2nd Corinthians 6.16, Ephesians 2.19-22 and 1st Peter 2.4-10.

Philadelphia was filled with pagan temples, so much so that it was referred to as “Little Athens” (see Acts 17.16-34 for an account of the religiosity of Athens). Most likely, though, Jesus is referring neither to the well known Jewish temple in Jerusalem, nor to the Christian community as a temple, but rather using this imagery to depict the new heaven and new earth “which is coming down out of heaven from my God.” Why would this have been important for the Philadelphian Christians?

- l. The steady, sturdy image of a pillar is meaningful for us, though we rarely see Roman columns. It would have been even more profound for the Philadelphian Christians, whose city suffered from debilitating earthquakes.

It’s for this reason that after describing faithful Christians as pillars in the temple of God, Jesus declares, “Never again will they leave it” (i.e. flee from the city). Philadelphian Christians

weren't promised that earthquakes would not happen, though they were promised that their eternity was secure.

IV. Reflect and Respond

- a. Take some time to reflect upon Jesus as the Open Door to God. Have you entered through this door? How have you done so? How did others in the Christian community help you see and enter through the door?
- b. After thinking through your own spiritual journey, allow the Holy Spirit to guide you in pondering the open door(s) that God has given you.

When a man had been converted, he came to Charles Spurgeon and asked what he could do to win others to Jesus. Spurgeon asked him, "What are you? What do you do?" The man responded, "I am an engine driver." "Then," Spurgeon responded, "is your fireman a Christian?" "I don't know," said the man. "Go back," said Spurgeon, "and find out, and start on him."

What about you? What do you do? Who could you start on?

- c. We may not always feel up to the challenge of sharing our faith. But remember, "God does not call the equipped, he equips the called." How is God equipping you?

V. Pray

- a. In Matthew 9, we read that "When Jesus saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, 'The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.'" Pray that God would send out workers into his harvest field! (and pray that you would be prepared for when He calls you!)
- b. Lift up our Holy Week gatherings, that God would be honored and glorified by our worship.
- c. Pray that the Holy Spirit would prompt unbelievers to join us this Easter to hear the good news of the Resurrection!
- d. Ask God to continue to lead us, by His Spirit, to connect with Him through congregational worship, grow in Him through study, and serve Him and the world he loves through service.