

An Open Door

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[0 : 0 0] So I want you to, as we begin, for you to imagine a room. It's a big room. It's full of lots of people, and you're one of them. You're enjoying a lavish dinner party. You're having a great time.

But the evening is wearing on, and it's turning into night. The stars are out, and so it's time to go home. But as you go and try to leave, you find that you can't.

You want to leave the room, but you find that every time you go to the door, you just can't seem to make yourself leave. Nor can anyone else. You're trapped.

There's no way to open the door. This strange nightmare scenario is that it's the premise of a film by the surrealist director, Louis Manuel, and I very much doubt this was his intention, but I think it quite aptly illustrates the human condition because of what the Bible calls the fall.

I want you to imagine that God is on the other side of the door, and all of humanity is in the room. There's a barrier between God and humanity, and humanity finds it impossible to open this door back to God.

[1 : 1 3] No matter how much we might want to, no matter how hard we might try, the way is shut. The reason that there is a barrier between God and us is what the Bible calls sin.

Our rebellion against God and our hearts that are far from him. Humanity has chosen to pursue life according to our terms, to live without reference to God.

And everything that is wrong in the world can be traced back to this, can be traced back to sin. Evil, selfishness, pain, and even suffering and death, they're all rooted, says the Bible, in sin.

We have separated ourselves from God, and we can't get back to living in harmony with him. We need someone on the outside to open the door and save us from this nightmare that we've created and foolishly chosen.

Only God can open the door. And this fact stands at the heart of this penultimate letter in these series of letters that Jesus sends to the churches in these early chapters of Revelation.

[2 : 2 8] The church in Philadelphia, it's one of only two of the churches here that's not criticised by Jesus, but they are a church that are very much in need of encouragement. They're a church that really needed to be reminded that Jesus has opened the door back to God the Father.

They needed to be reminded that the way is open and encouraged to hold on until the end. We've got three points to look at as we work through this letter.

We're going to think about the open door, the way through, and what's on the other side. So thinking about the open door, the gospel is rooted in the promise that a door once shut has now very much been opened.

Where once we were separated from God and without hope in this world, now a way back has been made. And this is what it means for Jesus to introduce himself to the church in Philadelphia in the way that he does.

So he says to them, these are the words of him who is holy and true, who holds the key of David. What he opens, no one can shut, and what he shuts, no one can open.

[3 : 4 2] So Jesus, he's presenting himself here as the one who is able to open the door back to God because he is the only one with the power and authority to do so.

He is firstly the Holy One. Now only God himself can be described as the Holy One. In just the next chapter, John's going to see a vision of creatures around the throne of God.

And they sing night and day, holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty who was and is and is to come. God is the Holy One. Holiness, it's this word that describes his perfection, his otherness, his separateness, if you like, from all other beings.

He is a sovereign creator who exists above and beyond everyone else because he is the one who has made all things. Now God, he can make other things holy by separating them and consecrating

them to himself.

It's why the New Testament can often speak of Christians as being holy. But only God can be the Holy One. If anything else is holy, it's only holy because he has made them so.

[4 : 53] And Jesus Christ, the Eternal Son, shares that title as the Holy One. And so Jesus has this divine authority as the Holy God himself.

And as the one true God, he is also truth itself. He is the true one, the true God, the true Messiah, the one in whom truth itself is found.

He is, as he himself told his disciples, the way, the truth, and the life. And Jesus also carries with him a royal authority.

For he holds, as he tells this church, the key of David. And so what is the key of David? Well, David was a king of Israel. He was a king who was described as being after God's own heart.

And God promised to David that he would establish David's house, throne and kingdom forever and ever. And Jesus, we learn in the Gospels, which tell the story of his life, is the descendant of David.

[6 : 01] And he's the heir to that forever kingdom. He's the king that Israel were expecting, though not many recognize this. Because people didn't recognize this, that he was crucified with the mocking charge above his head, the king of the Jews.

Except that he really was the king, both king of the Jews and king of all creation. But we haven't still quite got to the bottom of what it means for Jesus to hold David's key.

Well, Jesus here is quoting from the Old Testament prophecy of Isaiah. When Isaiah was writing, he was writing about the failure of the Old Testament kings and the faithlessness of Jerusalem, God's own city.

And God spoke and said that he would give a man called Eliakim the key to the house of David and said that what he opens, no one can shut, and what he shuts, no one can open.

And these are the exact words which Jesus quotes here in his message to the church in Philadelphia. Now, Eliakim, way back when the prophet Isaiah was writing, was chosen as a temporary stand-in for the king because the kings had failed to follow God.

[7 : 19] But Jesus is the true king, the true king of Israel, who has every right to the key of David, his ancestor.

And what he opens, truly no one can shut. And what he shuts, truly no one can open. The Son of God, the King, has come.

Jesus has come with the keys to open that door that was shut. If you feel far from God, perhaps you feel the idea of being trapped in the room and unable to get out, the good news of the gospel is that Jesus has opened the door.

When Jesus died on the cross with those words above his head, King of the Jews, he was dying in place of all of us. He was dying to take the Father's judgment for our sins upon himself.

He died like a sacrificial lamb in our stead so that he could open the door. His death is the way back to our Father in heaven.

[8 : 33] And when three days later he rose from the dead, it was like a declaration that the door now opened will never be shut again. The stone that has been rolled away will continue to be rolled away.

Everyone who trusts in Jesus and follows him is able to walk through this door that he has opened back into a relationship with God.

That stone that was rolled away from the empty tomb is like a doorway into a new world, a new creation, a new reality where we can have communion with God, where our sins and our failures are forgiven and forgotten, where eternal life stretches ahead and where death is no more.

Jesus has opened the door. But of course, when a door is opened, there's no guarantee necessarily that everyone will go through it.

Which leads us to think about the way through, which is our second point. Jesus has placed before these Christians in Philadelphia this open door. Hence he says, I know your deeds.

[9 : 47] See, I have placed before you an open door that no one can shut. But what does it look like to walk through it? Well, Jesus shows us that the way through is faith and faithfulness, belief and perseverance.

Jesus says in verse 8, I know that you have little strength, yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name.

And then in verse 10, he says, you have kept my command to endure patiently. So what we have here in the church in Philadelphia is a church that looks pretty weak in the eyes of the world. It doesn't look like it's got that much going for it, really. They're not powerful. They're not influential. But they do have this. And this is much more important than power, strength or influence. They have kept Jesus' word. That is, they have believed the gospel and they've not departed from it. They've not departed from the things that are contained within God's word.

[10:54] And they have not denied the name of Jesus. In the face of huge pressures, they've continued to defend and to stand by Christ.

And that's more than some of the churches that we've encountered in this series. And they're faithful, despite the challenges that come with believing the gospel in a culture that was completely opposed to it, like theirs was.

They've endured patiently, just like Jesus himself endured for them on the cross. They've been willing to deny themselves, take up their cross, and follow their Savior.

Walking through the door that Jesus has opened is believing in him and continuing to follow him in faith. I think a helpful illustration of this can be found at the end of Prince Caspian, the second book of the Chronicles of Narnia.

In the story, Aslan is sending people back from Narnia, back to earth. And the way he does is he makes a door from three stakes of wood. And the door is an open door.

[12:03] The way is clear. But through it, no one can see where it goes. And so many refuse to take Aslan's offer of safe passage home because they fear it.

They don't believe that it's true. They don't believe the claims that Aslan makes about where this open door goes. But the ones who do have faith, well, they walk through and they do go back home.

The door that Jesus has opened for us on the cross and in the resurrection is a bit like this. The door is open but to walk through it, it does require faith.

Not everyone can go through because not everyone believes. The only barrier is how one responds to Jesus, the one who has opened the door.

In fact, we see this very clearly from the situation of the church in Philadelphia because they were dealing with a group who have rejected that offer of the open door.

[13:07] And Jesus says in verse 9, I will make those who are of the synagogue of Satan, who claim to be Jews though they are not but are liars, I will make them come and fall down at your feet and acknowledge that I have loved you.

So a while ago when we looked at the church in Smyrna, we saw that Jesus called the Jews in that city a synagogue of Satan.

And so this leads us to understand that the Jews in Philadelphia, unlike those in Smyrna, were too opposed to the church and responsible for the kind of challenge and opposition that this church were facing.

But why is Jesus' description of them so strong? Well, the reason is it's because they of all people should understand. They are the ones who have received God's promises since the very beginning. Now the story of the church begins with the story of Israel and God's establishment of the Jews as his people. But these Jews in Philadelphia have rejected the promised saviour.

[14:16] They look at the door that Jesus has opened and they won't go through. Like those in Prince Caspian who doubt Aslan, well so these Jews doubt Christ.

They doubt that he is the fulfilment of all those promises that were made in the Old Testament and they refuse to go through. And then, to make matters worse, what they've been doing is making life miserable for those who have chosen to follow Jesus.

And so this is why Jesus says he's going to make them acknowledge that the true people of God, the true Israel if you like, are his church and those who have followed him.

That's why when we sang Psalm 130 which uses the language of Israel, we can sing that today because we are the true Israel as God's people. But the process of walking through this door that Jesus has opened, it is a long one.

because once someone believes in Christ, well there's then this whole life ahead to live for him and follow him and it's not always an easy life.

[15:26] We've seen that as we've looked at the various churches in these letters and we probably all know it from our own experience of following Jesus. And we see here that it's why the church in

Philadelphia needed the encouragement of Christ.

And where there is great encouragement is in this promise that Jesus gives to the Christians in Philadelphia. And it's a promise that stands for all Christians today. It's a promise of preservation. As Jesus says, since you have kept my command to endure patiently, I will also keep you from the hour of trial that is going to come on the whole world to test the inhabitants of the earth.

There's a degree of complexity here with these words and there's debate amongst commentators over whether the hour of trial that Jesus is referring to is about something that happened in the first century when this was written or if it's something that's still to come, something much further down the line.

Wherever one comes down on that question, though, I think the key takeaway is the principle. And the principle here is that Jesus keeps his people.

[16:39] Now, for Jesus to keep his people from the hour of trial, that's not a promise that life is going to be without difficulty or without pain. And all Christians will tell you, and we probably, if we've been following Jesus for a while, will know that following Jesus is not always easy.

We know often firsthand that life is not smooth sailing when we follow Christ. Rather, what Jesus is promising here is that when the hour of trial comes, and hours of trial always do come, as we know, he is going to bring his people through.

Things might be hard, but he will not abandon us. Jesus will bring us through the door and out onto the other side.

A helpful parallel to this is when Jesus prayed for his disciples in the upper room the night that he was betrayed. He prayed to his father and said, my prayer is not that you, father, take them out of the world, but that you protect them from the evil one.

And that is the Christian experience. Jesus rarely takes us out of the world or out of circumstances that challenge us, but he is always and unfailingly present in his spirit with us.

[18:03] By his spirit he is always protecting us. I love the images that we find in Psalm 91 that speak of the kind of protection that we have as we walk through life knowing Jesus.

It's a psalm that promises that God is like a shelter from the storm. He's like a fortress built up to withstand all attacks. He's like a great eagle who gathers his children under her wings and covers them.

And he's like a shield. He is our rock and he is our defender. It's because all this is true that Jesus says to the Christians in Philadelphia in verse 11, I'm coming soon.

Hold on to what you have so that no one will take your crown. Jesus is coming soon and that's true for us. Jesus is coming soon because as Peter tells us in one of his letters with the Lord a day is like a thousand years and a thousand years are like a day.

The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise as some understand slowness. Instead he's patient with you not wanting anyone to perish but everyone to come to repentance. Jesus is coming.

[19:20] He promises that he is. And when he does come it's going to be sudden. And so he says this to his people hold on to me.

Hold on to my salvation that I have won for you because I am coming and I do have a future for you so hold on.

And this brings us to our final point. As we think about what awaits the one who knows Jesus and follows him when they come through out onto the other side as it were. When they come onto the other side of the door.

The church in Philadelphia looked weak. They had little strength and we know from other ancient sources that this was a city that struggled with a damaged economy and from catastrophic earthquakes.

So when Jesus gives them promises of stability and permanence those promises would have really hit home for them. And this is what Jesus promises awaits the Christian on the other side.

[20:25] He says, the one who is victorious, the one who continues to follow Jesus and knows him, I will make a pillar in the temple of my God. Never again will they leave it.

The New Testament speaks often about the Christian being incorporated into God's temple. And that's what Jesus is referring to here. The temple, I mean, the Old Testament was the building where God's presence dwelt and where the high priest interceded on behalf of the people.

Only the high priest could enter it and even then only once a year. If we use our door illustration, it's as if the door was open but only just.

But when Jesus came, he was like a temple in human flesh. We actually will remove that word, like he was a temple in human flesh.

He was God incarnated, dwelling with humanity. He called himself a temple. He called his body a temple. And then after his death, resurrection, and ascension, we learn that Christians, the church, are the new temple.

[21 : 41] Because Christ dwells in us if we know him through his Holy Spirit. This is how Paul describes the change to the Ephesians.

Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers but fellow citizens with God's people and also members of his household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets with Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone.

In him, the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him, you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.

So where's the temple? It's not in Jerusalem. It's not in any church building that we might erect. It is the church throughout history, the people of God throughout every age and throughout the world. And Jesus tells the church in Philadelphia and tells us that we are pillars in his temple. We're integral to the structure. We're honoured. They will not be moved.

[23 : 00] This is true for us. If we know Jesus, if we're walking through this door that he is open for us, if we're united with him forever, we are incorporated into his temple.

Christ dwells with us and he will never leave us. In Christ, we will not be moved. And not only are we incorporated into our Saviour's temple, but we also bear a new name.

Which is why Jesus says, I will write on them the name of my God and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which is coming down out of heaven from my God.

And I will also write on them my new name. Whoever has used, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches. There's a lot of imagery going on here.

Jesus says that the name of God is going to be written on the Philadelphian church. And this is the culmination of a promise that extends all the way back to the Old Testament.

[24 : 05] Because God has since Old Testament times promised to put his name upon his people. Jesus says that the name of God's city will be upon them.

And this is actually a bit of a preview of the end of Revelation where John sees this. I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride, beautifully dressed for her husband.

and I heard a live voice from the throne saying, look, God's dwelling place is now among the people and he will dwell with them.

They will be his people and God himself will be with them and be their God. This is the fulfillment of a vision that the Old Testament prophet Ezekiel saw.

He saw a vision of a future temple and a future city. And Ezekiel told his readers that the name of that city was the Lord is there.

[25 : 07] In other words, God dwells with his people now, but he's going to dwell even closer with them in the future when Jesus comes. The people of God, us, the church, we are the city who bear God's name and bear the promise that God is there with us.

Philadelphia, this church who had little strength, they needed to know this. They needed to know that God is with them in the present and God is going to be with them throughout eternity.

And perhaps so do we. If we know Jesus, if we've gone through that door that he has opened, all these promises are ours. And they all come from Jesus, from the work he has done in his death and resurrection.

Jesus says that we, his people, will bear his new name. We are marked as his because we are united to him by faith forever. To bear a new name is, of course, it's a big deal.

A change in name marks a significant change in circumstances. Probably the most common occasion where people change their name today is at marriage. marriage. And that is a massive change.

[26 : 28] And so it's not for nothing that the Bible uses that illustration of marriage to explain what happens when we believe in Jesus, when we follow him, and when we're united to him. It's why those words from the end of Revelation speak of the temple coming down as a bride beautifully dressed for our husband.

judgment. We are united to Christ in marriage whenever we believe in him, whenever we receive his name. And so this is a wonderful, helpful, important promise to keep a tight hold of because to be a Christian, as the Christians in Philadelphia found, it can be difficult.

To walk through that door that Jesus has opened, it's rarely easy. It's a road that is fraught with opposition, temptation, and sometimes despair, but it's also a road filled with joy and love and grace.

A road we walk on together as Christ's church, empowered by Christ's Holy Spirit who is dwelling amongst us as the temple of God. And the promise to hold on to is that on the other side of the door, Jesus has opened up for us an eternal future.

Sometimes it might seem hard to comprehend from our present circumstances, from where we are, and certainly I'm sure that's where the church in Philadelphia was standing, looking at the future and thinking, is it really going to happen?

[27 : 59] It might even have seemed to them like wishful thinking. But this promise is certain and sure. Jesus has opened for us a door, he has opened for us a way, he is giving us help in his Holy Spirit to keep walking through, and on the other side, he has secured for us a future.

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