

## Revelation 3:7 Church in Philadelphia

I have a number of points from this passage concerning the church in Philadelphia. We'll look at the first point in Revelation 3:7-8

### 1) ASSURANCE

#### Revelation 3:7-8:

*<sup>7</sup>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: <sup>8</sup>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.*

#### The door to the Father is open

The first point concerns assurance because if the door is opened to us, it simply means we now have the opportunity to enter into His Kingdom. If the door is shut on us, we are done for! So this is what the Lord Jesus is saying to the church in Philadelphia, "The door to the Kingdom is open; you now have access to the Father. You can communicate with God. The connection is established."

The link is so needful because according to the background of Philadelphia, the church is going through a hard time with the Jews. They have rejected the disciples of Jesus. The disciples were not allowed into their synagogues because they were regarded as heretics. This sentiment persists up to this day if you go to the ultra-religious section in Israel. The feeling of hostility is still there against the followers of Jesus.

Now one of the things we must understand is that the disciples of Jesus and the Jewish people were both reading the same Scriptures. We are not talking about a different religious script. Because as we know during that time, the New Testament had not been canonized yet. There was no such thing as the New Testament. They were reading the same Scripture. The disciples of Jesus could see that it is pointing to Jesus as the Messiah, but the Jews who read the same Scriptures, do not see it. We can read the same Bible and yet come to a different conclusion. Now how do we know who is right?

In this case, it is very crucial because it has to do with the question of salvation. We are talking about something very elementary right here. The Jews could not see it so they reject Jesus as the Messiah. We can see this in the book of Acts. Later, the Jews were starting to report to the Roman authorities about these disciples, the followers of Jesus. They were telling the Roman authorities that these people are not part of them, especially Jews who are believers of the Messiah Jesus. So, this new development exposes the church to possible state persecution.

The church in Philadelphia was facing rejection everywhere they turn. In other words, they were completely marginalized; all the doors are closed to them. That's why Jesus says to them, "Don't worry if the doors are all closed. What is most important is that the door to the Father is open and remains open. Even now, you can enter into His presence." What great assurance and comfort!

Many people can be negative about us, but what is most important is, the door to the Father is open. But if the door to the Father is closed, I think no matter what we do, we are finished. So this is a very important point that I want to point out.

Now, to whom does this “open door” apply to? Well, those who have kept Jesus’ word. The word, “my” is important. As I said, the disciples and the Jews were reading the same Scriptures. You will notice Jesus did not say, “You have kept the Scriptures” because if the Jews were hearing this, they will say, “We keep the Scriptures too.” But Jesus says, “You have kept my word and have not denied my name.” So the “my” is very important. The word here is associated with Jesus. It has to do not just with his teaching but his life. In other words, they were becoming more and more Christ-like in the way they behave, in the way they carried themselves, and in the way they taught the word of Christ.

Though the church in Philadelphia faced rejection everywhere they turned, they continued to love one another and were supporting each other. They were encouraging each other to remain steadfast in Christ and helping one another as much as they could. So you see the beauty right there: an oppressed community that continued in the love of God. They were not cowering in fear. On the contrary, they have the dynamic of God’s love, going out to others, reaching out to the others wherever they go, whether in the marketplace or their neighbors. So we see a very beautiful picture right there. While the church was under a lot of pressure, and the danger or the possibility of martyrdom is real, they continued to follow the Lord Jesus. Consequently, the door to the Father remains open to them.

### **Perseverance – standing fast despite the pressures**

#### **Revelation 3:10**

*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 upon the earth.*

Note again these important words, “my perseverance” because we are not speaking about human endurance or determination. Peter and the other apostles thought they had it but when the trial came, they failed! The church meditated on the life of Jesus, and understood the way he conducted his ministry, and in particular, the way he related to his God who gave him the power to persevere up to the cross. We have the benefit of the four gospels but we do not know which gospel is available to the Philadelphian church.

In Greek, the word translated as persevere simply means, you stand fast despite the pressure that is put upon you. It is like a soldier who makes his stand even though he is surrounded by enemies. Why? Because they love the Lord Jesus and want to observe everything he has taught them. They know that what is taught is scripture.

This matter of endurance or standing fast under pressure is a very important aspect in the book of Revelation. I don’t know if you remember way back in 1986 when the space shuttle Challenger was launched. It was a very exciting moment and was telecast live. To the horror of the onlookers, that shuttle exploded in mid-air. All the astronauts were killed. Later, there was an inquiry. Of course, there

were a lot of things some people have to answer for, but one person was exonerated (free from blame). His name was Allan McDonald who recently passed away.

He was responsible for the booster rockets. Before they were going to launch the Challenger, Allan had to sign and certify that the Challenger was safe to launch. According to him, he said he was under a lot of pressure to sign and approve the launch. However, according to his professional opinion, the Challenger did not pass the test. He had a choice to make: either sign the form and risk the lives of seven astronauts set to board the spacecraft or, refuse to sign and risk his job, career, and the good life he built for his wife and his four children. He refused to sign and was willing to accept the consequences. When the Challenger exploded, that confirmed that his expert opinion was correct.

The Philadelphian disciples had to stand firm and accept the consequences. It might mean that they would lose their jobs and career, and even the good life that they have had. They are willing to accept all the consequences. That is what the love for the truth entailed. If we want to talk about the love for the truth, we have to stand on, for example, biblical monotheism. In Revelation 3:12, four times our Lord Jesus addressed the Father as “my God.” In verse 2, “my God” occurs there too. Some people are not familiar with the fact that Jesus has a God and He is the Father. So even here, Jesus is speaking as a man who is glorified by God and is now at His right hand.

### **Revelation 3:12**

<sup>12</sup> *The one who conquers, I will make him a pillar in the temple of **my God**. Never shall he go out of it, 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 from **my God** out of heaven, and my own new name. (ESV)*

Going back to endurance, sometimes we have to make a hard choice, and that is when many people buckle because we are afraid of the consequences. When we make the right choice, Jesus says, “the door is open” because you are willing to accept the consequences. From now on, you have your logistics from heaven. It is Yahweh who will supply your needs. It is Yahweh who will encourage you, and our Lord Jesus will stand with you.

### **Strive to enter – fight your way to enter the Kingdom**

#### **Luke 13:23-24**

<sup>23</sup> *And someone said to Him, “Lord, are there just a few who are being saved?” And He said to them,*  
<sup>24</sup> *“Strive to enter by the narrow door; for many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able.*

In a way, this door is open to everyone. Now to seek to enter the Kingdom is one thing, yet it is not good enough. You have to fight your way to enter in because that’s what the Greek word for “strive” means. Even if we have the desire to enter the Kingdom, it is not good enough. However, in the church today, to seek to be saved is already good enough. Just say, “Yes” and they will baptize you. But to fight would mean you pay a high price to enter. Since it’s a narrow road, for a start, you will need to give up a lot of baggage that weighs you down or hinder your progress. The road into the Kingdom involves hardship

(Acts 14:22). So while the door is open, I hope we will take advantage of this, and enter into that door with determination of the will because it is a matter of life and death.

### **Through Jesus' death we can enter into the presence of God**

#### **Hebrews 10:19-22**

*<sup>19</sup>Since therefore, brethren, we have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus, <sup>20</sup>by a new and living way which He inaugurated for us through the veil, that is, His flesh, <sup>21</sup>and since we have a great priest over the house of God. <sup>22</sup>let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.*

Jesus has opened the way to the Father. In verses 19,20, it is a new and living way he inaugurated for us through the veil, that is, his flesh. So it is through Jesus' death that we can enter into the presence of God. The writer to the Hebrew is addressing those people who are suffering for the Lord. That is how they experienced that God is so near.

Some Christians from China were sharing that when they were in China, they were poor but they were all saying, "Wow, God was so near to them. They can pray to God and He answers their prayer." A particular sister was sharing how the Lord continued to encourage her and that He was so real to her. However, when she came to Canada with her family and had a good life and a good salary, she admitted that she did not experience God anymore. The door is shut. Now I am not saying that coming to Canada is a bad thing. In that case, then, the door to the Kingdom is shut on me too.

So you see the problem. We have a contrast between the church in Philadelphia and the church in Sardis. The difference is: one is dead, the other is alive. In the case of Sardis, the door was shut. But in the case of Philadelphia, the door is open. Why? We must remember these words, "keep my words" and "the word of my endurance." When we are comfortable and have a good life, it is very easy to lose our spiritual endurance. As we saw last week, it is a problem of **complacency**.

### **Important to have the consciousness of our spiritual need**

#### **Hebrews 4:16**

*Let us therefore draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and may find grace to help in time of need.*

In our kind of environment, it is very easy to lose that sense of spiritual need. That's what we are going to see when we look at the church at Laodicea. The consciousness of our spiritual needs is what we need every day. All the more would we want to draw near to Yahweh.

### **The Philadelphian church was very faithful**

Let's go back to Revelation 3:7-8, "*Behold, I have put before you an open door.*" In terms of tenses, in Greek, we have a perfect tense here. That is something that happened in the past, but the result continues to the present. That means up to then, the door is continually open to the church in Philadelphia. In other words, the Philadelphian disciples have been faithful from the beginning. They never let up on their faithfulness to Yahweh. That's why the door remains open.

I hope we can get this assurance from Jesus himself. When we are anxious, troubled, facing a problem or uncertainty, there is access to God. We can experience how Yahweh can lead us by His Word concerning all these matters. That is what sustains us and keeps us going. So it is important to ask the Lord Jesus, "Is the door to the Father open to me?" We want to apply this verse personally and in practical experience.

I hope we begin to understand what biblical assurance is all about. It is not something that the pastor tells you. It is not something that other Christians tell you. It is something that God Himself will tell you, whether you have the access to Him or not. I think we should know if we are honest with Him.

## **2) VINDICATION**

### **Revelation 3:7-8**

*<sup>7</sup>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: <sup>8</sup>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. (ESV)*

So with the remaining time, we move on to the second point which has to do with vindication. In verse 8, the question we want to ask is this: how is it possible that you keep his Word and yet have little power?

We would have thought if I kept the Word, let's say I keep all the teachings in the book of Matthew, then spiritually I should be quite strong. That is what John said to those categorized as young men, "you are an overcomer because you kept the Word of God" (1John2:14). Now you see a contradiction here. How is it that they have always been keeping the Word and yet have little power? Well, the answer here is that the little power is not spiritual. Spiritually they are rich but socially they have little power. You see the same thing with the church in Smyrna.

**"Little power" refers to socially and not spiritual power**

### **Revelation 2:9**

*I know your tribulation and **your poverty (but you are rich)**, and the blasphemy by those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan.*

The church in Smyrna was undergoing the same trials as the church in Philadelphia. We know why they were poor. They could not join any trade guild because of idolatry; they cannot worship the Emperor

and they were rejected by the Jews and so were exposed to state persecution. Now the Jews have their guilds of course because they won't pray to other gods. So the Jewish community helped each other. The disciples of Jesus could not join any of them. It affected their jobs and salary and the result is, they became poor.

Our Lord Jesus says, "But spiritually you are rich". It is obvious poor people do not have power. If they are in trouble with the law, they could not hire a lawyer. The poor are disadvantaged in many, many ways. It affects their social status, and are regarded as nobodies and have no class. So in this sense, they have little power.

Well, "little" is already not too bad. Maybe the only power they have is their muscles, I suppose. Maybe as a community, they might be able to do something but they can't do very much. The might of the Roman Empire and the power of the Jewish community is much more than what the Christian community can take.

## **2 Corinthians 12:10**

*Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ's sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong.*

Paul says that he is well content with weakness. He is not just referring to his physical weaknesses. He goes on to insults which is what we get when people reject us. Then, distresses or pressures, pressure at work, from society and neighbors. Those who turn to our Lord Jesus get pressure from the family as well.

I have shared this before that in my generation, anyone who converted to Christianity in Malaysia has a high price to pay. One could get disowned by the family, others were beaten. So we all understood what it means to become a Christian. In some countries, the family of those who had become Christians would threaten them with death. So the church became their family if they managed to escape. We would have thought that those from Christian families would fare much better but when their grown-up children decide to serve God full-time, the parents got upset because they had already planned for their career paths. One is to be a doctor; the other one is to be a lawyer and the third one would be a businessman. All are respectable professions. So you have "family planning" right here! Those from Christian families do suffer too. It is okay if you are just a believer and go to church but if you want to dedicate your life to God's service, that is not acceptable! You can see the hypocrisy here.

Paul is writing all these for our sakes too. There you see, "with persecution and with difficulties." This difficulty has to do with financial difficulty, for example. When you are poor, you face all kinds of difficulties in meeting one's needs and that of the family, as well as the needs of the ministry.

Then he goes on to say, "I experienced all these for Christ's sake." He is not trying to be a hero but knows the reality that "when I am weak, then I am strong." He functions by God's power. It is He who made him strong. So the church in Philadelphia is spiritually strong but socially has little power. We now go back to the verse in Revelation 3:9.

## **When afflicted, Jesus will turn everything around**

### **Revelation 3:9**

*Behold, I will cause those of the synagogue of Satan, who say that they are Jews, and are not, but lie – behold, I will make them to come and **bow down at your feet**, and to know that I have loved you.*

When we are afflicted, Jesus will turn everything around. For all the injustices that the Jews did to the disciples in Philadelphia, Jesus says that they will come and bow down at their feet. But this concerns the second coming. Bowing at the feet is taken from Isaiah 60.

### **Isaiah 60:13-14**

*<sup>13</sup>The glory of Lebanon will come to you. The juniper, the box tree, and the cypress together, to beautify the place of My sanctuary; And I shall make the place of My feet glorious. <sup>14</sup>And the sons of those who afflicted you will come bowing to you, and all those who despised you will bow themselves at the soles of your feet; and they will call you the city of the LORD, The Zion of the Holy One of Israel.*

It has to do with the temple that God will establish again which is referring to the end times. V:14 refers to the Gentile nations. They afflicted the Israelites and it says there, “*those who despised you will bow themselves at the soles of your feet, and they will call you the city of YAHWEH*”.

In other words, the New Jerusalem that Jesus was talking about in Revelation 3:12 is where the nations will acknowledge the presence of God Yahweh. But this is in the future. Here is what Jesus says to the church in Thyatira:

## **Important to remain faithful to Jesus’ word**

### **Revelation 2:26-27**

*<sup>26</sup>And he who overcomes, and he who keeps My deeds until the end, to him I will give authority over the nations; <sup>27</sup>and he shall rule them with a rod of iron, as the vessels of the potter are broken to pieces, as I also have received authority from My Father.*

You still need to keep His deeds and His words until the end. Then Jesus says, I will give him authority over the nations. These Jews will see on that day, which is still in the future, that the people they afflicted are now the rulers of the nations. Then they will all bow before them. Of course, the saints are not going to take revenge. The persecutors will see who is right and who is wrong and they will humble themselves and give glory to God. The saints will give glory to God too because the redemption and vindication come from Him.

Now we will be happy of course in this present life, that those who wronged the saints will themselves turn to Yahweh and apologize. It is a way of humbling oneself when you are truly sorry and apologize. There’s always the hope that people will turn to God in the present life, so we don’t just think of the future. But the important thing is this: our business is to remain faithful to the Word, specifically to Jesus’ word. Perhaps those who oppose you now might see the light in their lifetime. They see the

reality of Yahweh's justice, love, and mercy. Then they come and say, "I didn't realize I was wrong all the while."

I remembered one auntie who was highly critical of us because to her, we didn't do the right thing in the way we conducted the ministry. A few years later, we met her again. When we saw her, we all braced ourselves. Surprisingly, she broke out in a smile and then said apologetically that she was sorry she gave us much trouble. She started sharing a bit about herself. Anyway, we were very relieved. We could see how Yahweh worked in her life. It is a wonderful experience to see how those who were once hostile to you for the sake of the gospel, later realized that they were wrong and were willing to reconcile.

So that reminds us of Paul, isn't it? He was persecuting the Christians only to realize later, through the intervention of our Lord Jesus, that he had been wrong.

So I hope this can be our experience but we need to remain faithful. That's all! The rest is up to Yahweh God. So Yahweh will continue to work and if the person is receptive to Yahweh, he might turn around, from an enemy to a friend. That's one of the rewards of the gospel, isn't it? It has nothing to do with money. It is the joy of seeing your enemy becoming your friend and a friend of God and Christ Jesus our Lord. May Yahweh continue to encourage our hearts.