

THE SEVEN CHURCHES OF ASIA

The Church With the Open Door

Program #1052

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EDDIE: Do you have doors of opportunity that are open for you and through which you might walk to do greater service in the kingdom of God? The first century church of Philadelphia had an open door given to them by the Lord, and we're going to study that congregation today on *The Truth In Love*.

EDDIE: Welcome to *The Truth In Love*. We are nearing the end of a series of lessons that we began several programs ago on the seven churches of Asia from the first three chapters of the book of Revelation. We're going to be looking at the church in Philadelphia in just a few moments, but we thought since we were near the end that we would take a few moments at the start of this program to summarize where we've been with the previous churches that we've studied, beginning with the church in Ephesus back in Revelation 2. Mark Teske is on the program again. We're glad to have Mark. We're going to begin our summary with a brief look at the church in Ephesus.

MARK: The church at Ephesus was one that was very concerned about doctrinal purity. They were commended for the very fact that they were testing and found some false apostles, and they were dealing with that. They also hated the work of the Nicolaitans, which Jesus said He also hated. So we see great doctrinal purity there in Ephesus. But the problem they had was that they had left their first love. The motivation for doctrinal purity that they should have had just wasn't there. They were doctrinally pure, but for the wrong reason.

EDDIE: Next the church in Smyrna, that is spoken of in Revelation 2:8-11, was a congregation facing tribulation and persecution. Jesus warned them that persecution would be coming their way, and that some of them would be cast into prison and so forth, but the admonition to them was to be faithful, even to the point of death. If they would do so, they would be granted and given the crown of life. So there was admonition to them, as well as to us, that regardless of what happens in life, we need to be loyal, faithful and true to Jesus. And so from Ephesus to Smyrna, then we looked at Pergamos.

MARK: And with Pergamos, we see some names that come up there. One of the names that shows up is Balaam who was mentioned in Numbers 22-25. The doctrine of Balaam that they were accused of accepting was one which would seduce the children of Israel to idolatry and fornication. He knew that was a way to get to them, and that's what he did to get to them. They dealt with the synagogue of Satan. Again, Jews in name and in physical lineage had missed the point of the scriptures and were persecuting Christians, who were indeed God's appointed. We talked about several passages in the book of Romans showing that the church is really the Israel of today. Once again, we have the Nicolaitans who are hated, and the congregation in Pergamos is commended for their hatred of the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, again showing how important doctrinal purity really is.

EDDIE: The church in Thyatira follows that, beginning in Revelation 2:18. There were a lot of good things that were said about the church in Thyatira. Jesus said, I know your service, your faith, your love, your patience, and that your latter works are even more than the first. There was a lot to commend the congregation there. But, He said, you have allowed this woman Jezebel to remain among you. And she was guilty. This was probably a literal woman in the congregation, but called Jezebel in a figurative sense because of her wickedness. She had not only been wicked herself, but had convinced others to engage in immorality. And because of that, she was going to be punished. God warned the congregation very strictly about her condition and what was going to happen to her. As with each of these congregations, He offers them a promise of a future blessing if they'll repent and turn back to Him. And that concludes chapter 2. Then in the beginning of chapter 3, we have another congregation.

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we exercise that causes it. Romans 8, starting in verse 38, "For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

EDDIE: So the outside forces can't take it from us, but we can remove ourselves, which is why you have admonitions like Jude 21, "Keep yourselves in the love of God," and 2 Peter 3:17, "Beware, lest you also fall from your own steadfastness." It is possible to fall, and that's why the warning is given. But then He adds another incentive when He says those who do overcome, and don't fall away, will be made pillars in the temple, which were marks of strength, stability and permanence. Then He mentions some special identifying marks about being given the name of God, the name of the holy city and the name of Jesus as being those things that would identify them with God and with things holy and with heaven. Those are certainly great things to think about. And what a great church this was. No condemnation was given.

MARK: We see those promises that are out there before them. And like the promises that were given to them, we promise if you write to us, we'll get this material to you.

EDDIE: That's right. And we'll keep that promise. All you have to do is send us a note of some kind. You can send it to our regular mailing address, P.O. Box 865, Hurst, Texas 76053, and we'll be glad to send you a copy of today's lesson, or even this entire series of lessons on the seven churches. You can have that in a number of forms. You can have it in the form of an audiocassette or an audio CD, or if you like video, we offer it in DVD. And all those things are free. We have a number of written materials. We have an excellent booklet that will be of great benefit to you called *From My Heart To Yours*, written by a faithful gospel preacher, Maxie Boren. That's free of charge. Just let us know which materials you'd like to have that are available, and we'll send those to you. We have an e-mail address if you want to contact us that way, requests@thetruthinlove.com. And our web site is www.thetruthinlove.com. There's a lot of good information on the web

MARK: In the beginning of chapter 3, we're introduced to the church at Sardis, who was one that received no blanket commendation from Jesus, but they received the condemnation that we see in nearly all the other congregations. But there was really not a whole lot of good to say. The city was up on a hill, and they had the natural defenses, but oftentimes in their history they had fallen asleep when they were being invaded, and people could sneak up on them. The church was dealing with something very similar, that they were not paying attention where they should. They thought that everything was okay. They thought they were alive, but in fact, they were really dead. They were in self-deception. When they should have been paying attention to things, they were really asleep, and it was causing great problems. Nevertheless, there were still a few who hadn't soiled their garments, and who still had those embers that could be flamed into a fire if the proper inputs were given to it.

EDDIE: That brings us to where we are currently in our study, in Revelation 3:7-13, where Jesus has a few words to say to the church in Philadelphia. But before we look at what He says to the congregation, here's just a little background information on the city itself. It was located about 28 miles southeast of the city of Sardis. It was named after its founder, whose name was King Attalus Philadelphus of Pergamos. The word "Philadelphia" means "brotherly love." And just like the American city of Philadelphia, that's where its nickname comes from, "The City of Brotherly Love." This particular city, the first-century Philadelphia, was known by a different nickname. It was called by many the "Little Athens" because of the many temples that were there. If you go back and read Acts 17 when Paul went through the city of Athens and began to speak with some of the folks there, that was one of the things that he highlighted in his introductory remarks. He says, I went through your town and saw all your temples and altars and things there to various gods. Athens was known for that, and evidently Philadelphia was as well. It was a city that had been designated, and built for the purpose of being a center for the spread of Greek culture. So it was a missionary city in the sense of spreading Greek culture. And that may be something of the reference to the open door that the Lord will say to the church in just a moment. But just like there was an open door to spreading Greek culture in the city of Philadelphia, perhaps the

congregation there would have an open door for the spreading of the gospel. We'll look at that in just a moment. But first of all, as Jesus begins His letter, He identifies himself, as He does in all these letters, in verse 7 by calling Himself "the holy and true." Those are some terms that have a lot of meaning.

MARK: Yes. The word holy is something that is oftentimes, I think, underappreciated. Holiness is really something that's been set aside for a special purpose. I guess the best way to illustrate that would be the fine china that you bring down out of the china cabinet just for those special occasions. It's set apart, and special, designated for these special purposes, as differentiated from the everyday, common tableware that you would use. This is the real special stuff. That's the idea we get of holy. Something that's been set aside, is special and really important.

EDDIE: Jesus is called "the Holy One of God," (Mark 1:24). It's said of Him in Acts 2:27 that God would not "allow Your Holy One to see corruption," referencing the resurrection of Christ, and how His body would not remain in the grave. So Jesus is referred to as holy on a number of occasions, and He was a special individual, no doubt. But He is holy, not only the Holy One, but holy and true, it says in Revelation 3:7, which brings the idea of being dependable, genuine and real. And that's certainly characteristic of Christ.

MARK: When you put those things together, we see credentials that are unparalleled anywhere. He's holy, He's set apart, He's special, and He's true. He's not false. He's going to call the shots just the way they are. He's not going to make a mistake. He's going to get right down to the matter, and He's going to be true about it. He's going to be absolutely perfect in the judgment that He renders.

EDDIE: That's exactly right. And further, He's described as He who has the key of David, which is interesting terminology. I think if we tie in a couple of Old Testament passages, it might help us to grasp a little better what He may have in mind there. Just simply the idea of a key is something that implies access, and the ability to open or close, the ability to lock or unlock. So if Jesus is the One who has that ability and authority to open, close, lock and unlock, what is the reference then to the house of David? In Isaiah 22:22, there's a prophetic statement that

times debated religiously, about whether or not a person can lose the crown that they've been promised.

MARK: The passage here is clearly showing that one can indeed lose that crown. We see that many times in scripture. We read in I Corinthians 10:12, "Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall." There we see that exact phrase used, that one who thinks he stands needs to take heed, because he can fall. He can fall short. He can fall away. We've seen so many of these churches told to repent, change from what they were doing and come back, and remember the way they were before. They were on the right course, but they drifted away, and He's going to deal with them for their sinfulness unless they come back.

EDDIE: He told the church in Ephesus, if you don't repent, I'll remove the candlestick from its place. We know from the latter verses of Revelation 1 that the candlesticks represented the churches Jesus claimed as His own. And when He says I'll remove the candlestick, He's basically saying, I no longer recognize you as a group of my people. All these warnings, the ones that you mentioned in I Corinthians 10 and other places, don't mean anything if it's not possible. Why would Paul say, take heed, beware, lest you fall, if it wasn't possible to fall? Paul even told the Galatians, "you who attempt to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace," (Galatians 5:4). Now, we need to let Paul say what he said. He said those brethren had fallen from grace. And either they had or they hadn't. Paul said they had. I'm going to stand with Paul. Peter would talk about the person who once becomes enlightened and embraces the gospel, then goes back to the ways of the world as being like a pig (or a sow) that was once washed (or cleansed), and then returns to wallowing in the mire, (2 Peter 2:22). And he says in the latter part of that verse, that person is worse than the first. There are many passages in the Bible that refer to this.

MARK: Hebrews 10:26 and following comes to mind, that "if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins." There once was that sacrifice, and willful sin has removed that sacrifice, and taken it away. It's kind of interesting as well that in Romans 8, Paul explains to us that there's no outside force that could take it away from us. It's our own free will that

MARK: We see this positive picture of the church there at Philadelphia. As we add these things together, they have the opportunity there. Nobody can take it away from them. We see their faithfulness. We see their ability to keep the word, the power that they have, their perseverance, and that they had not denied His name. There's a number of qualities here which are quite positive. I think as we go from here, we can see why Jesus can indeed make a promise to them, because there's something to build on.

EDDIE: That's right. And again, what a great example the congregation is that He doesn't go into a long litany of negative things about this church. He says, I know who you are, and I've put a door of opportunity in front of you. He not only expected them to walk through it, He knew because of their characteristics that they could. And in verse 9 He begins to make a promise to them. It seems that just similarly to the church in Smyrna, this congregation in Philadelphia had faced some opposition from a Jewish element, called accurately a synagogue of Satan, which could be said of anybody that opposes Jesus, regardless of who they are and from what background they come. Jesus said to some of his own contemporaries, "you are of your father, the devil," (John 8:44). He said that to those who were enemies of His. And these people had faced that kind of an element. But He says to them that He's going to keep them protected from a coming trial.

MARK: He brings that opportunity before them, and He brings protection for them. There's going to be some trouble coming up ahead, but He's giving them protection. Some of the other churches didn't get such a promise as this: that you're going to go through some persecutions, and it has taken some Christians' lives. Here He's saying He's going to give them some protection through that in a physical way.

EDDIE: Yes. We're not told specifically what this particular coming trial or persecution was. He just simply tells them that something is going to happen to them. He gives them the warning and the admonition in verse 11 that they are to hold fast what they have and be careful and hold tenaciously to the things that they have, lest someone come and take their crown, which is a very stern warning. It's a warning that, if it were not possible for them to lose that crown, would make no sense at all. That really opens up a very important topic that is a lot of

spoke of the coming Messiah who would have the key to the house of David. And Acts 15 is where we find a reference in the New Testament, where the house of David is said to be a reference to the church. So on a point we've made previously that I think bears more emphasis, here in this terminology of His having key access to the house of David or the church is something again that implies very strongly His authority over the church.

MARK: As Jesus himself admitted in Matthew 28:18, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth." And obviously, that authority extends to the church as well. That authority we see in action as we get into the letter to Philadelphia.

EDDIE: Right. After His identification of Himself, He offers in verse 8, as He normally does, a commendation, and something positive that He can say about the congregation of Philadelphia. He says concerning them that He has a door open for them, which seems to be a door of opportunity. There are references throughout scripture about God opening doors for others. Acts 14:27 speaks of God having, "opened the door of faith to the Gentiles," allowing Gentiles to have access into the kingdom. Jesus, the One with the keys to the church, to the house of David, used those keys to unlock the door of the church to the Gentiles, opening the door for them. In I Corinthians 16:9, Paul said, "A great and effective door has opened unto me." There are additional references to that in the New Testament as well.

MARK: II Corinthians 2:12 reads, "A door was opened to me by the Lord." And in Colossians 4:3, Christians were told to pray "that God would open to us a door for the word." We see that imagery continuing not just here in Revelation, but throughout scripture. So we have Jesus with the keys of David, and He's opening a door. He's done the work as far as He can. He has opened the door for us. But now as individuals, it's our responsibility to take advantage of the door that's been opened, and we have to act in some sort of way. We have to walk through the door. It's kind of interesting that this imagery isn't that He's opened the door and carried us through. But He's done his part, the things that He has to do, and now He relies upon us to do the things that we can do for ourselves.

EDDIE: Exactly right. Underlying this whole concept of the opening of doors of opportunity, is the concept of God's providence, which is something very real and something in which God is very active. And often in response to the prayers of faithful saints, God will open various doors of opportunity. Remember the words of Jesus in Matthew 7:7 and following, where He emphasized the need to "ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you." So with the idea of seeking God's assistance and help, we're promised that God will give us that if we're faithful to Him, and He'll respond appropriately, according to His will and in His providential workings in the world will often open doors to us. James said in James 4:2, "You have not because you ask not." Some members of the Lord's body are living beneath their privileges, because they don't take advantage of the special providence of God that is available for His faithful children through the process of prayer.

MARK: And as God works providentially, that's to be contrasted to the miraculous that He can accomplish as well. The days of miracles have indeed ceased, but God can work behind the scenes and cause things to happen that don't necessarily contradict the laws of nature as a miracle would, but in the natural course of events are things that we don't understand how God affects, but we know that He does. He hears our prayers, and He's willing to answer them. But precisely how, we don't need to get caught up in that. Just rest assured, He's working behind the scenes. I think the book of Esther in the Old Testament really explains that for us. God's name doesn't show up anywhere in that book, yet we can see Him working providentially behind the scenes in that He brought Esther to the king's chamber "for such a time as this," as the passage there states. We can read that He was able to save His people through this woman who became queen. Again, we don't hear or see God directly dealing with the situation, but we know He's working in the background bringing about His purpose.

EDDIE: Very well said, and a great example of the providence of God. God had providentially opened the door for this congregation. As Mark pointed out so well a moment ago, it was going to be up to them to take the initiative and walk through that door. But God also gave them the promise, that this door has been opened, and nobody will be able to shut it. So it's there. It's an opportunity there for the taking.

Whatever specifically it may have been, it was a door of opportunity, and they had the responsibility to walk through it. He lists for them in the same section in verse 8, three qualities that would allow them to take advantage of the opportunity and walk through that door. He says, "you have a little power." Now, when you read that, it might come across initially as not very complimentary, but I don't think we should view it that way. I think one of the points to be taken from this is that a person does not have to have much or be much, in some sense as we tend to use those terms, in order to be effective in service to God. A person can be little in a number of ways. Perhaps the congregation was small in number, or perhaps was small or little in some other sense. But that was not going to keep them from being able to walk through this door. Perhaps people sometimes think because they're small in number, stature or whatever that they can't render some service to God, and that's really not true.

MARK: When we talk about that, my mind goes back to the book of Judges and to Gideon. His army was brought from many thousands down to 300 men who were able to persevere and gain the victory. Again, it was a small army, but God, who was the power, delivered the enemies into their hands. We see Him working. By man's judgment, sending most of your army home to leave only 300 is not a wise military decision. But God was there proving His point. That was the thing that was foremost. The battle was His and He was going to deliver the enemies into their hands.

EDDIE: That's right. So whatever little meant, the bottom line was they had enough resources and power to walk through that door. And with that, He says, "you have kept My word." Through some kind of undescribed storm that they may have faced, they did so without compromising. They kept the word of the Lord, and He says, "You did not deny My name." Where they may have had opportunity to deny Christ by proclaiming Caesar as Lord, as they were oftentimes tempted and compelled to do, He said, you "have not denied My name." And because of that, the power that they had, their faithfulness to His word, and the fact that they had not denied His name would all be good characteristics for them to have that would enable them to walk through this door the Lord had opened for them.