



Sunday, November 5, 2023

Revelation 3:7-13

As we've been walking through the book of the Revelation of Jesus Christ, over the past few months, we have seen very clearly that this is a multi-faceted book with many different layers - similar to that of an onion. Each layer represents a different focus and there are many such layers within this book. This is why it can be such a challenging and even confusing book for many of us to engage with. And we're not alone. In fact, there are scholars that have dedicated their whole life's work to re-searching the many layers within this book, and even they cannot all agree on everything that is going on.

Now, as we have just walked through the first couple of chapters, we've already seen that one of the main layers is the audience that John is writing to. We know that this book was written to seven specific churches in the first century but also that it wasn't limited to these seven churches but meant as a message to the whole church - past, present and future. So the language in some of these letters must be read in such a way that embraces the churches at that time, the church of our time and even the church in the future. And this is why it can be so hard to navigate, because we simply don't know exactly what the future holds. And so today, here in Chapter 3 we will begin to see more of that futuristic layer being peeled back as we delve into some of the prophetic statements of Jesus as it relates to the church in Philadelphia.

Revelation 3:7-13 (NKJV)

“And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write,

‘These things says He who is holy, He who is true, “He who has the key of David, He who opens and no one shuts, and shuts and no one opens”: 8 “I know your works. See, I have set before you an open door, and no one can shut it; for you have a little strength, have kept My word, and have not denied My name. 9 Indeed I will make those of the synagogue of Satan, who say they are Jews and are not, but lie—indeed I will make them come and worship before your feet, and to know that I have loved you. 10 Because you have kept My command to persevere, I also will keep you from the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth. 11 Behold, I am coming quickly! Hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown. 12 He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he shall go out no more. 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 out of heaven from My God. And I will write on him My new name.

13 “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.” ’

Historically, the church in Philadelphia was known as the faithful church, and as we have just read, there is good reason for that. After all, this was a church that had not lost its first love; it was a church that had remained loyal under the ‘thlipsis’ pressure; it was not engaging in societal ideologies that were contrary to the Gospel, and in contrast to the church in Thyatira and Sardis, historically, we know that this was a church that was boldly confessing Jesus in the marketplace. And so it’s no wonder that the message from Jesus here is one of great affirmation. There was no need for a rebuke - nor was there need for a warning. Only an encouragement to keep on keeping on. To keep on running the race, exactly as they had been running the race, so that they would finish well and acquire the crown.

Now because all of these churches are in the same general geographic area - which would be modern-day Turkey today - they would have all experienced the same governmental and societal structures and so, when we read of a church such as Philadelphia that wasn’t giving into temptation, you can be assured that it wasn’t because their city was that much easier to live in as compared to other cities. The reason that they were able to persevere is simply because of the reliance and dependance on the Holy Spirit that they had learned to embrace so well. And so Jesus speaks to that and says a few different things to them in the midst of their journey. And the first thing I want to draw your attention to is how He now introduces Himself: He who is Holy and True. He who has the key of David, He who opens and no one shuts, and shuts and no one opens”: 8 “I know your works. See, I

have set before you an open door, and no one can shut it; for you have a little strength, have kept My word, and have not denied My name.

The words Holy and True are significant here because historically these words were reserved for God and God alone. In fact, if we were to take a page out of the book of Isaiah, we can see on numerous occasions where this old testament prophet makes it implicitly clear that these words are only to be used for God and God alone. So, by Jesus now declaring Himself as holy and true, what He's really doing is He's equating himself with God the Father, and declaring to all that would listen that He is indeed the Messiah.

Now, this was incredibly fitting and appropriate because historically Philadelphia had a large Jewish population. And, through the diligence of the church in Philadelphia, many of these Jews were accepting Jesus Christ as Messiah so, by hearing this introduction by Jesus, this would have further reassured them of their decision to follow Jesus. Conversely however, there was still a large population of Jews that viewed this language as blasphemy and would not tolerate the Jewish-Christians wanting to continue to worship in the Synagogue because they were now worshipping Jesus - which they viewed as blasphemy - so they literally kicked them out and shut the doors of the synagogue to them - forcing them to find alternative places of worship.

Which is why Jesus now says that He has placed an open door before them that no one can shut - which is actually a reference to salvation: that the door that is open before them is the door that leads to life and although the Jews have the authority to shut the door of the synagogues to them, they cannot shut this door. Why? Because Jesus holds the key. And in our world today we understand that the one who holds the key is the one who has the authority.

Share story of kids fighting over who gets the keys to open the house and then taunting each other when they had to go to the bathroom...because...he who holds the key, holds the power.

But notice that it's not just any key that Jesus is holding here. It's the key of David. Well that little detail paired with the phrase, 'who opens and no one shuts, and shuts and no one opens,' is another reference to the prophet Isaiah. This time it's a direct quote from:

Isaiah 22:20; 22

"Then it shall be in that day,

That I will call My servant Eliakim the son of Hilkiah;

22 The key of the house of David

I will lay on his shoulder;

So he shall open, and no one shall shut;

And he shall shut, and no one shall open.'

Now check this out: In Isaiah 22, a man named Shebna worked as a steward for King Hezekiah, but Shebna was a wicked and unfaithful steward. So the Lord directs Isaiah to tell the king to replace Shebna with a man named Eliakim. Eliakim now, has control of the key to the palace—which is referred to as David's house. Eliakim controls the gate... and he now has the authority to determine who can come into the King's palace.

Well, in the same way, just like Eliakim controlled who came into David's house, the Messiah - Jesus - also controls who comes into God's house. Jesus is making it clear that He is the one with the key but not just any key - the key of salvation that opens the door of salvation that no one can shut. He alone has the authority. This is important because when we look at the example of a key, it doesn't matter how many keys you have, each key is specifically formulated to open a specific lock. My house key doesn't work in my Jeep. My son's bike lock key won't work to lock my front door. The key to the front of the church doesn't work in the portable and so on and so forth. So Jesus is the only key that works to open the door of salvation. There is no other way to open that door. Good works won't do it, peaceful meditations won't do it, praying day in and day out won't do it, Allah can't open it, Buddha can't come close, and humanity doesn't stand a chance. Jesus is the ONLY key to salvation.

Now here's where things move a little beyond our comprehension, because we can't talk about keys and doors and salvation, without bringing the book of John into the equation because in this book, Jesus now identifies Himself not only as the key, but also as the door.

John 10:9

'I am the door. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture.'

Which, if you've been following closely means that Jesus is declaring himself to be both the key to salvation and the door to salvation. Which seems to be an impossibility, unless, of course, you are God. I think Jesus is just making it implicitly clear, beyond any kind of shadow of doubt that He is the only way to heaven. You can't get to the Father unless you go through Him first. He is the only one that paid the price for your salvation so it makes good sense to me that He is the key to salvation and the door to salvation. It's the Gospel and the church in Philadelphia was on the right path.

But as much as this was a message to the church to keep on keeping on, it was also a warning to the Jews who had rejected Him as Messiah. Just like with the church in Smyrna He now refers to them as the Synagogue of Satan as they have outrightly denied Him as the Christ and are operating now under the control and influence of the kingdom of darkness instead of the kingdom of light. And in part of that warning, Jesus goes on to say that there will come a day when... 'I will make them come and worship before your feet, and to know that I have loved you.' This is another significant statement because this is yet another fulfillment of prophecy from Isaiah. This time it's chapter 45 where we read that the Egyptians would come and bow at the feet of Israel, acknowledging that the God of Israel is the one true God.

Isaiah 45:14 (paraphrase)

*"The labor of Egypt shall come over to you,
And they shall bow down to you saying, 'Surely God is in you,
And there is no other; There is no other God.' "*

Now, if you grew up in a Jewish community, this was a benchmark prophecy to hold onto. That, at some point, those who opposed you would come to you in submission and humility recognizing that God was actually in you, not them. However, in the New Testament when Jesus came as the Messiah, the Jews rejected Him as God and so Jesus was now making it implicitly clear that they were now the ones in the wrong and 'Jesus would make them come and worship (Me) before the feet of the church in Philadelphia, and to know that they were right.'

In addition to this, because they have kept His command to persevere and to not give in to the pressure of the Jews or the temptation of the world, He now promises to...'keep them from the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth.'

And so, it's at this point in the story, where things begin to take a bit of an interesting turn as there seems to be a bit of a duality happening here in Jesus statement of protection. We know that since He is speaking to the church directly that this message is specifically for them. It seems that Jesus knows that at some point in the future there is going to be some sort of trial that they will be spared from. But remember that Revelation is a book about layers so this message is not only for the church in Philadelphia, but also the church - past, present and future. And we can definitely see the futuristic element of this statement as it relates to a coming time of testing and tribulation on the world but that God will spare those who persevere and stand for Him. For those that have read ahead, then naturally, we can see the reference here to the Rapture and the Great Tribulation.

Now, we aren't going to go deep into the end times theology today, as we will get to that in the coming weeks and months but for now a brief overview will have to suffice. The Bible tells us that Jesus Christ will return one day for the church and that before He does there will be a number of things that happen in the world that will indicate that His return will be soon. Two of those elements are the rapture and the great tribulation. The Rapture is the event where believers will escape death and be caught up with Jesus in the air as He beckons them home upon His return. Some believe that before that happens Christians will have to experience a great tribulation (a time of unprecedented global distress and divine judgment upon the earth) and that this rapture will be part of their reward for persevering. Others believe that Christians will only be around for the beginning of that great tribulation and then there are those that believe that Christians will escape that tribulation entirely. Scholars agree that this verse seems to support the idea that upon the return of Christ, believers will be caught up in the air to meet Jesus and will escape the judgment and great tribulation that He is on His way to pronounce upon the earth. This position would be referred to as the pre-tribulation rapture.

Like I said, we'll get to the nitty gritty of that over the coming weeks and months but, as it pertains to the church in Philadelphia, any way you look at it, the point is that this would have been interpreted very clearly that God was protecting them and that was the message that God wanted them to hear.

And part of that protection meant that those who put their faith and trust in Him and did not succumb to the ideologies of the world, 'I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he shall go out no more. 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 out of heaven from My God. And I will write on him My new name.' There is a lot going on here but I want you to take particular note of two things that Jesus promises here. He promises a place of protection that they will not go out of anymore and He promises to write on them, His name.

Philadelphia was situated on the edge of an active volcanic area that was prone to tremors and earthquakes. And although that meant great, rich soil for farming, it also meant an incredible amount of fear for the people living there. You never knew when an earthquake would hit or when a tremor would turn violent and so whenever an earthquake did hit, the people would leave the city and come back when it was over. This became their norm and the more that this continued to happen, it got to the point where some people even left the city every night to sleep on the outskirts for fear that a quake would strike in the middle of the night and kill them. Needless to say they were always going out and coming back in. There's was a city wrapped in fear. And so when Jesus uses the

line that they will not have to go out anymore, He is speaking to their fear. He is saying: I am your security, I am your unshakeable foundation. You will never find true safety and refuge in the world, but you can find true safety and refuge in me.

Not only that but He then goes on to say that He will write His name on them which symbolizes a deep, spiritual identification and belonging. That they are His and He is there's. It signifies that as believers we are marked as God's own, belonging to Him and sharing in His divine identity.

Relate to Andy's name being written on the bottom of Woody's foot. Once that name was painted over, Woody began to struggle with his identity....

At the end of the day, it's a reminder that Jesus is the key and the door is unlocked himself wide open so that all who enter, may enter in to a place of safety, refuge, freedom, and true identity as He writes His name on our hearts.

1. Stand firm.
2. Salvation is found in no other name but the name of Jesus. He is the door to heave and the key to salvation. Some of you haven't yet placed your trust in Him.
3. Some of you have fear that Jesus wants to release you from.

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