

Many couples who are the same age as my wife and I... have curio cabinets in their house. ... This is where they display treasured items (like antique fine china tea sets.) My wife has such a treasure... which used to be her grandmother's. Patti has inherited it... and apparently it is very ornate. I say "apparently"... because I don't recall ever seeing it. We don't have it on display (in a lit cabinet.) ... In fact... I think that it is packed away in a particle-board cabinet of a spare bedroom (of our house.)

I am certain that the tea set was treasured by her grandmother... and I know that Patti's mom cherished it as well. Patti now has the joy of knowing that this fragile piece of art **is in her possession**. ... But *it sits*... carefully wrapped with newspaper... boxed... and tucked away in the back of a cabinet.

(Now) I should tell you that I think Patti is wise **not** to have it out and in service. (You see)... the paint that was used on it... is **led**-based – so it could create health issues for any user. So... there will never be an opportunity for it to be used - in the manner for which it was made.

You know... it's tragic... isn't it... when people treat the warnings we find in Scripture... like a "packed-up and tucked-away" piece of fine art. We appreciate knowing about it... and having it in our possession... but **if** we do not use the warnings in Scripture as they are intended – the consequences will be **UN**imaginably FAR MORE TRAGIC!

We have been studying the seven letters to the seven churches that are found in chapters 2 and 3 of the book of Revelation. *All but one* of the five letters that we have examined so far... included serious **warnings** to their churches... and to us – which could be packed up and tucked away... like Patti's heirloom tea set... Having the appearance of beauty

and usefulness... but given no opportunity to be used. ... (“*We finished our study of those verses... now let’s move on...*”) ... [ P A U S E ] ...

One of the common elements to these warnings that I am noticing... is that we must hold firm to the Scripture truths and principles that have been given to us. We don’t need to let them go under threat of persecution... or blend them with (or make them secondary to) the world’s beliefs and traditions. ... [ P A U S E ] ... It’s ironic... isn’t it (?) that the very warnings we easily forget about – are warnings NOT to forget our Spiritual instructions.

(Now)... the letter of our study this morning is different. The Church of Philadelphia is not given any condemnation... (they are not given any warnings for things of which they should repent. They are only commended... (And) Jesus tells them that He will give them more opportunities.

The church age... in it’s entirety is represented by seven letters to seven churches... that Jesus instructed John to write. (The number seven represents completeness... and these seven churches represent the complete history of the church from Pentecost... when the church began... to it’s end at the rapture.) We have been studying these letters (one a week) since we began the second chapter in our study through the Book of Revelation.

We have been seeing... in each of these letters a prophetic on-going fulfillment. ... John was addressing specific contemporary situations inside each church of his own day... ... But also (just as Old Testament prophecy often did)... these letters also clearly relate to future events as well... And these seven letters correlate perfectly with the entire history of the church

(from it's beginning at Pentecost – to it's end – which will be at the rapture.)

(If you were with us) you may recall that in the letter to the church at Ephesus. we saw that it had a strong parallel between the literal church in Ephesus during John's day... AND to the church period from Pentecost to around 100 A.D. (when the next church age began.) ... Both had patiently endured hardship... defended God's truth against false teachers... worked sacrificially... but eventually only did ministry out of a sense of duty. (They had lost their first-love for Jesus)... and they were warned that if they did not repent... Jesus would remove their witness to the world... Today... when we look to the entire region where Ephesus had once thrived... their testimony has been extinguished. It is a Muslim land today.

Then we studied the letter to the church at Smyrna. which amazingly paralleled the period of church history from 100 A.D. to 312 A.D. ... The Church of Smyrna is the church under persecution. The letter said there would be ten periods of testing... and when the time came from 100 A.D. through 312 A.D. the church had never known (previously... or since then...) such severe persecution. During that time period... 10 separate Roman Emperors tried to extinguish the church. But it eventually ended.

Next... we looked at the letter to the church at Pergamum. This represents the church period from 312... to approximately A.D. 590... Beginning in 312... Emperor Constantine not only made Christianity legal... but forced his armies and induced much of Roman society to convert to Christianity. He was allowed to take over and to preside over the church as it's leader... and so in this period of church history... we see the Church marry the world... (The word Pergamum means "to marry.")

Then we studied the letter to the church at Thyratira. This parallels the

period of church history from 590 – 1517... when the church tolerated a person identified as “Jezebel.” ... Jezebel led this church era into idolatry (just as the Jezabel in the Old Testament led Israel into it.) But THIS Jezebel also led God’s people into depreciating the person of Christ... and venerating His human mother (Mary.) There are many parallels to the development of the system of Catholicism and the contemporary church at Thratira. ● The word Thyratira mean continual sacrifice... which was developed during this historical period as the church developed the unbiblical concept of mass (where Jesus is sacrificed every time mass is celebrated.)

Last week... it was the letter to Sardis. ● The word Sardis means "escaping ones"... or "those who come out." ... This period is the Reformation period from about A.D. 1517 to A.D. 1750. ● (You see)... In the midst of spiritual darkness... there were those who escaped its contamination. ... Among those who "escaped" or "came out" were Luther... Knox... Wycliffe... Zwingli... and others. ... These were the great reformers who broke with Rome.

Jesus said of this church... (or period of church history)... that they had the reputation of being alive... but they were actually dead. ... Christ described their dead orthodoxy... where adherence to creeds and doctrinal positions were far more primary than outreach... forgiveness... and loving behavior. Cold... hard orthodoxy became their focus as if it is the church’s ideal.

(And)... This brings us to today’s letter. ● to the Church at Philadelphia.

Most of you probably already know that the word “Philadelphia” means “brotherly love”... (coming from two words... “Philos”... meaning “love” and “delphoi” meaning “brothers.”) ● We have been seeing how the names of

each of these seven churches have played a significant part... in describing what their corresponding period of church history would be like.

The period of church history that we looked at last week was characterized by their lack of love – they were dead... with only head-knowledge.

Christianity had become cold... formalistic... and lifeless. ... But the Lord brought change in the next church period... between the years of 1730 to about 1950.

The Lord at this time brought about a great revival. This revival centered largely the within United States... England... Scotland and Wales... and was the beginning of the greatest Missionary movement of all times. ...The great missionary movements were in full swing. ... No one could ever stop the forward movement of the gospel when the Church took advantage of the open door to service.

Primarily during the years from 1700 to 1900 there was virtually NOWHERE missionaries could not go. God had opened the door wide for the church to evangelize. There were hardly any limitations. It was Jesus Who opened the doors... and the church was faithful to go through them! Today... we are in a different church era. Many countries have closed their doors to missions.

During this period of church history... God called men like George Whitefield... Charles Wesley.... Charles Finney... D. L. Moody... Billy Sunday... and many others to proclaim His word. Ministries on college campuses (like Navigators... InterVarsity Fellowship... and Campus Crusade for Christ) were impacting hundreds of thousands of young people.) Youth for Christ and Young Life were on High School campuses. And inner cities had Y.M.C.A. and Y.W.C.A that were started to reach young

men and women with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Following World Wars 1 and 2 ... men coming out of the military had burdens to reach places like Japan... China... Africa... and the Gospel-cold-grown Europe. They started vibrant mission organizations.

Doors were opened and the second coming... was being preached everywhere. People were being saved and looking for the Savior to appear at any moment. Christians vibrantly evangelized...defended the faith... and preached revivals... with self-sacrificing love.

I was born into the glowing embers of this Church era... and have watched as the last and final church era (which we will cover next week) has been ushered-in. .... (We are now in the church era that is labeled “SELF LOVE”... and “PEOPLE RULE.”) ... Many of you listening to me... have (also) lived part of your lives in the previous church age (represented by the letter to Philadelphia.) I appreciate hearing your memories of church experiences when the Philadelphia Church Era was in full swing. ... It was a time when there was great missionary expansion... God was opening impossible doors of effective service... and church folks had a great love for one another.

Even though we are no longer part of that era... (for we are presently in the Laodicean Church age)... there can (and are) elements of it... that will live on... to the time that the church is raptured off the earth. There are remnants of each major period... that continue to exist. (Characteristics of the **Ephesus** church era – like losing our first love... the **Smyrna** church – the church persecuted... the **Pergamum** church – wedding ourselves with the world... the **Thyatira** church – depreciating the Person of Jesus... etc. carry-on through all of church history.)

This is why every one of the seven letters that John wrote... end with the admonition “*he who has an ear let him hear what the Spirit says to the church(S)*” - **PLURAL**. Every letter speaks to **all** the church(es) - every era of the church’s history. ... But *The descriptions of each individual letter* depicts the most characteristic patterns and behaviors of **THAT** particular church period to which it was addressed.

(For example) one of the *promises* that are made to the Church at Philadelphia (will DEFINITELY be true for *many* in EVERY CHURCH ERA... including the Laodicean church period)... It is the promise that they will be spared from the coming Tribulation on the world. (We will see that very promise in verse 10 today. It will be true *characteristically* of the church of Philadelphia – but also true of many in the Laodicean church age. Many living in our current church age will *also* will be spared from living through this coming wrath of God.)

Living Water (today) can possess some of the characteristics from *each* era of church history. But (hopefully) we will resemble **MOST OF ALL** the descriptions of the church at *Philadelphia* (this church era - that was only *commended* by Jesus.) ... I like to believe that we are a “Philadelphian Church... living in the Laodicea Church Age.” Maybe YOU will too... So... let’s look at the description now.

 **Revelation 3:7-13** 

(History shows) that the purpose of this city was to be a *mission outpost* for the spreading of the *Greek culture* throughout the regions of Lydia and Phrygia which is in the region of Turkey today. It was located at the place where the borders of three countries met.... Mysia... Phrygia... and Lydia. Philadelphia was the *Gateway to the East*... and a strategic location for

being a mission outpost... to Philip and Alexander the Great for making Greek culture dominant. ... The city succeeded in its mission so well that by 19 A.D. ... the Lydian language had been completely replaced by the Greek language. They were not as successful with the Phrygians who resisted the changes from the West. But the point is that the location of the city of Philadelphia gave it natural opportunity (open doors) for successful Hellenization of the region. (AND) John's letter addressed to the church at Philadelphia (once again) has perfect parallels to the church era that it represents.

The only major problem with the location... was that the area was prone to earthquakes. ... Philadelphia sat on a geological fault... and in 17 B.C. it was destroyed by a severe earthquake that also destroyed Sardis and ten other cities. ... Afterward... many of the citizens remained fearful... and refused to move back into the city. ... There did not seem to be much security in the city of brotherly love! ... They were few... and their potential for greatness was weakened by their multiple earthquakes. ... It's reputation for earthquakes (as we will see) also plays a part in what John wrote in his letter. GOD'S WORD IS **BEAUTIFUL** IN THE WAYS IT COMMUNICATES!

● **Revelation 3:7** ●

The background for our understanding what is said here... is found in Isaiah chapter 22. ... Assyria had invaded Judah (as Isaiah had warned)... but the Jewish leaders were trusting Egypt - not God - to deliver the nation. One of the treacherous leaders was a man named Shebna who had used his office - not for the good of the people - but for his own private gain. God saw to it that Shebna was removed from office and that a faithful man (Eliakim) was put in his place and given the keys of



authority.

● **Isaiah 22:19-22 (ESV)**

*<sup>19</sup> I will thrust you from your office, and you will be pulled down from your station. <sup>20</sup> In that day I will call my servant Eliakim the son of Hilkiyah, <sup>21</sup> and I will clothe him with your robe, and will bind your sash on him, and will commit your authority to his hand. And he shall be a father to the inhabitants of Jerusalem and to the house of Judah. <sup>22</sup> And I will place on his shoulder the key of the house of David. He shall open, and none shall shut; and he shall shut, and none shall open.* ●

Eliakim was a picture of Jesus Christ... (a FAITHFUL AND TRUE authority over God's people... who replaced an authority (Shebna - who acted in his own self-interest... during a dark time of Judah's history.) Indeed (unlike Shebna) both Eliakim and Jesus held the key to the house of David! By lineage and by the eternal will of God... both Eliakim (but most importantly – **Jesus!**) are the RIGHTFUL heirs to the earthly... visible... actual throne of David.

Jesus is the Keeper of the Keys. He has the keys to the Kingdom of Heaven... the keys to God's presence... the keys to eternal life... the keys to the storehouse of divine truth... the keys to heaven. ... (AND LISTEN!) **He has the keys to all our circumstances!** ... .. He has the keys to the doors of Christian service. ... He says to the saints in Philadelphia:

● **Revelation 3:8** ●

In the New Testament... an "open door" speaks of opportunity for ministry (Acts 14:27... 1 Cor 16:9... 2 Cor 2:12... and Col 4:3). ... It depicts the fact that it is **Christ** Who determines where and when His people shall effectively serve.

(Oh! Please hear me!)... As followers of Christ (who want to serve Him

effectively)... we tempted to “pull wires” and do a little “politicking” and we try to “slap backs” and “know the right people” and “make contacts” in order to **ensure** effective ministry. ... But the only proper promotion comes not from the north... south... east... or west... but from God! ... .. And if we commit our way unto Him and trust Him... **He** will bring it to pass.

No man (or group of men) hold the keys to Christian service. The Lord is still in charge and His eyes run to and fro throughout the whole earth to show Himself strong on the behalf of those whose heart is perfect toward Him. His headquarters is heaven and His itinerary is made up by the Lord of the Open Door.

Paul spoke of open doors in Ephesus and in Macedonia. ... Our current era of church history (the ear of Laodicea) is the *Church of the Closed Door*. Foreign fields are closing and missionaries are denied visas for entry. They have to come up with all sorts of creative ways to get into much of the world today... especially the Muslim countries... and even Europe! Even the way our missionaries need to communicate with their home churches is done with great carefulness. I often get personal letters and emails from missionaries that are coded or say “please do not speak openly of this information – because we might get kicked out of this country.” ... But Philadelphia was the Church of the Open Door.

But please do not misunderstand me! Yes... we are in a different church era... but Christ is still setting before us open doors. ... I stand by what I said earlier... the general character of our current era may NOT be as it once was. (The previous era was characterized by MANY open doors.) ... But wherever we have an open door to us... we have a great responsibility to preach the gospel! When Jesus Christ opens a door for us... (and He does)... we must go through it. We must busy ourselves with His work.

It is also interesting that Jesus prefaced His open door promise with the statement, **I know your works**. This is important! God never gives us greater opportunities... until we are faithful to use what He has already given us. ... Because of their faithful use of God's Word... Christ would open doors for them that no one could shut.

God will make a way for any Christian or church that applies His Word... and honors His Name. ... But let's be very careful here... and not misunderstand this as some sort of remuneration (quid-pro-quo) ... because of our ability... faith... or works.

It seems to me that the nature of the relationship... between the faithfulness in the church in Philadelphia... and the open door... is **not** one of that they *earned* an open door... but one of the power of the word of Jesus... *producing* an open door. ... That is... Jesus does not give the church an open door as a payment... in response to the service they rendered by keeping His word. ... Rather... Jesus gives them His word... which is living and active... powerful... life-giving... opportunity creating... and when they properly use it... the word of Jesus opens doors.

It is not a matter of our great strength... or our great ability... but the great **dependability**... of God's Word... and the Person of Christ. ... It is not the size or strength of a church that determines its ministry... but (hear me now)... **the application of His Word**.. and desire to see the Name of Christ honored!

The Lord does not blame us for having little strength... but for having little regard for His Name and His Word. (I am going to say that again.) ... **The Lord does not blame us for having little strength... but for having little regard for His Name and His Word.**

## ● Revelation 3:9 ●

That emphasis on the saints' condition (they had little power) helps them to look to Him for strength to help in serving Him and in entering the open door. It is not our power that is important; it is His power and strength that matters. He will keep the door open. He will enable us to serve. Look not at your own strength—that can be very discouraging—but look at His strength. Be sure of your calling, then let Him take care of the needed power.

We can have all the education available... the best of programs... the most appealing literature... and put on great evangelistic meetings... but apart from Christ opening the door of opportunity - we will fail most miserably.

(And know this... as well)... Just because Christ opens a door... does not mean that our walking through it will be easy. Verse eight mentioned an obstacle that keeps many from going through... and that was having little power in themselves. Verse 9 gives us a different one – human opponents. To the first century church at Philadelphia... they faced opposition from ethnic Jews.

These people may have been Jews in the flesh... but they were not "true Israel" in the New Testament sense. (Paul argued in Romans 2:17-29 that a person becomes a Jew by believing God's promises... not by birth... and that Christians (because they believe God's promises) are true descendants of Abraham.

How were these Jews (by birth only) opposing the church at Philadelphia? For one thing... by excluding Jewish believers from the synagogue. Another weapon was probably false accusation... for this is the way the

unbelieving Jews often attacked Paul. ... Satan is the accuser and he uses even religious people to assist him. It is not easy to witness for Christ when the leading people in the community are spreading lies about you.

Anyone who has found themselves persecuted because of righteousness... opposed because of the gospel... can be encouraged by what Jesus says here to the church in Philadelphia. ... Jesus tells this church that keeping His word is not only the path that leads to the open door... it is also the path that leads to **triumph** over the enemies of the gospel.

I think that it is also significant that during this period of church history (the Philadelphia period) was the era that saw the rise of cults (like Mormonism... Jehovah's Witnesses... and Christian Science.) One of the common elements of these cults is that each one claims to be the "real Jews." J.W.'s (for example) say that they are the 144,000 Jews that Revelation chapter 7 mentions. Mormons make the claim to be "the ten lost tribes of Israel."

*"I will make them to come and bow down before your feet, and they will learn that I have loved you".* ... These pretenders will ultimately have to acknowledge Christ as Lord - but to their condemnation.

*"They will learn that I have loved you."* Those who are discounted and despised in this world... will be acknowledged and praised by the fakers - as being right. The ungodly... to their shameful condemnation... will one day recognize that believers were the ones who were right. ... The day is coming when the Lord will show what is right and who is right.

(LISTEN! Can you honestly say you agree with this...?) ... "**The greatest friend of truth is time.**" ... Error is always in a hurry... but God's man can afford to await the vindication of time. ... And if he is not vindicated in his

own lifetime... eternity will settle the score.

● **Revelation 3:10** ●

This is one of the clearest statements that true believers will not go through the Tribulation... This is a precious promise for the believer. It is a reference to the blessed hope—that God's children will be delivered from and kept out of the tribulation that is yet to come upon the unbelieving world. The Church will not go through the tribulation. At some appointed day... just before the tribulation... Christ will rapture His people from this sin darkened earth.

Because of the way Revelation 3:10 is so carefully worded... the fact that it refers to the great and coming Tribulation - is almost NEVER debated. John goes out of his way to make it clear. It is the time of trial that is about to come **on all the inhabited earth**. (Nothing of this nature has happened since Noah's flood – EVER!)

Jesus' promise in Revelation 3:10 (a verse that anyone interested in Last Day Prophecy should memorize) provides great security for every Christ-follower. Why? Because Jesus isn't going to keep us **THROUGH** the Tribulation... but **FROM** the Tribulation!

(LISTEN) There are so many Bible teachers who say that the church will **go through** the flames of persecution... just as Shadrach... Meshach... and Abednego endured the fiery flames of the fiery furnace. Those teachers believe Christ will be with us and keep us safe in the midst of it – enabling us to endure it.

But Revelation 3:10 is a clear contradiction of this teaching. Jesus said: "*I will keep you from the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world,*

to those who dwell on the earth...” He did NOT say “I will keep you **DURING** the trial...” He did not say “I will keep you **THROUGH** the trial...” No. Jesus VIVIDLY and clearly says: ● “I will keep you **FROM**... .. the **HOUR OF THE TRIAL**...” This requires a removal BEFORE the trial ever occurs.

- “FROM” is the Greek word “ek.” It is used hundreds of times in Scripture. For example... “Out of Egypt have I called My Son...” (Matthew 2:15) ● “First cast out the beam, out from your own eye...” (Matthew 7:5). “For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts...” (Matthew 15:19). “Many bodies of the saints came out of the graves after His resurrection” (Matthew 27:53). “I will spew you out of my mouth” (Revelation 3:16 – a verse we will see next week.)

I read with interest (this week) several commentaries that were written by men... who I know believe that Christians **will** go through the tribulation. (I wanted to read how they handle the well-defined teaching of this verse.) ... They either simply denied it... or wrote something to the effect of: “Believers will go through the tribulation, because the Anti-Christ will murder saints... So the church will still be here...”

What they do not consider is that once the rapture occurs... those who we have witnessed to... (but they resisted)... will see that what we said was true. The rapture is going to convince a lot of people who are skeptics today. It will be too late for them to be raptured... but not too late for them to show their faith by not taking the Mark of the Beast... and then suffering martyrdom for it. ... So I say “Hogwash! This text is very clear... and there is no reason to deny what it plainly says...”

● **Revelation 3:11** ●

If ever our souls need to be on guard... it is today. The temper of the times demands it. The world is chloroformed by the prince of darkness and Christians slumber in spiritual stupor. Our natures demand it. We are lazy and inclined to float downstream instead of to swim against the current. Forgetting the things which we have heard... we can easily drift away from them.

We can't lose our salvation... but our eternal rewards can be stolen... by **1) discouragement**. ... Elijah and John the Baptist were two excellent servants of the Lord... but discouragement overcame them. (I don't know if they lost any reward... but if THEY could be discouraged – you and I must NOT think that we are *immune*.) If we would run the race before us WELL... we must not let discouragement keep us from walking through any door that Christ opens for us... and we consequently lose an eternal reward.

**2) Success** can also result in a loss of reward. ... We must let heaven (and not earth) motivate us. "Success can "feather our nest" so comfortably that we forget how to fly.

**3) the pressures of this world** can steal our rewards... by entangling us with so many concerns. ... .. If we will continue to be a Philadelphia church in a Laodicean age... then we simply must be on our guard against the dull... draining atmosphere of the world around us.... And not allow our crown to be stolen.

 **Revelation 3:12** 

Do you remember (earlier on) that I mentioned Philadelphia was known to be prone to earthquakes...? ... The symbolism in this verse (of their earthquakes) would be especially meaningful to people who lived in its



constant danger. The verse refers to the stability of the pillar... no need to go out or to flee... a heavenly city that nothing could destroy.

Ancient cities often honored great leaders by erecting pillars with their names inscribed on them. God's pillars are not made of stone... His pillars are faithful people who bear His name for His glory. ... He will make those who follow Him strong... stable... immovable... permanent... durable... and standing in God's house.

Pillars also represented honor. In pagan temples they were often carved in such a way to honor a particular deity. Philadelphia could relate to the honor of a pillar. ... It was their custom to honor a man who served the city well as a magistrate... benefactor... or priest by erecting a pillar in a temple with his name on it. ... His name would be remembered by the worshipers in the temple. ... Jesus said: "*I will make a pillar for you in my temple. I will honor you.*"

He will write the name of God... and the place of our eternal dwelling on the overcomer. ... All of this will give the overcomer much prestige/honor - *something we do not have on earth.*

God will not do this for the treasured tea pots that are boxed up and sitting in kitchen cabinet. No... God is looking for weak vessels... clay pots... the kind that can be filled with His power and His strength... and then be sent out into a crash-bang world... walking through the doors that He will open.

Why should we be willing to do that? Because: "***The greatest friend of truth is time.***" ... Eternity will settle the score.

Let's be a Philadelphia Church in the Laodicean Age!



**Revelation 3:13**

