

5. Merced is *Gateway to Yosemite*.

(Perhaps Hanford's could be *Gateway to Arsenic Poisoning?*).

The first century city of Philadelphia was a sort of gateway. According to William Ramsay it was founded because its geographic location made it ideal,

...to make it a centre of the Greco-Asiatic civilization and a means of spreading the Greek language and manners in the eastern parts of Lydia and Phrygia.

Jesus saw Philadelphia as another kind of gateway; or, to be more precise, a **doorway**. He told the believers in Philadelphia that He had the **key of David** and was using it to open a **door** of service. Staying with the metaphor Jesus promised (v12) to make them **pillars in the Temple of... God** in the future heavenly city of **New Jerusalem**.

The believers in Philly had a **door** of service open before them. They needed encouragement to go through the door by faith despite the opposition they faced.

Whether it is opposition or apathy or something in-between, **we** need encouragement to go through doors the Lord has opened before us.

Revelation 3:7 "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":

Each letter is addressed to the **angel of the church**. **Angel** means *messenger*. It sounds strange to us but the first century church would immediately recognize the term **angel**. It was borrowed from the organization of Jewish synagogues – one of whose officers was called an **angel**. Here is a quote from the American Tract Society Bible Dictionary:

The stated office-bearers in every synagogue were... first the Archisynagogos, or ruler of the synagogue, who regulated all its concerns and granted permission to address the assembly. Of these there were three in each synagogue. The second officer-bearer was "the angel of the synagogue," or minister of the congregation, who prayed and preached. The service of the synagogue was as follows: The people being seated, the "angel of the synagogue" ascended the pulpit, and offered up the public prayers, the people rising from their seats, and

standing in a posture of deep devotion... The last part of the service was the expounding of the Scriptures, and preaching from them to the people.

Philadelphia, as you well know, means *brotherly love*. It is an apt name for a church being encouraged to spread the Gospel. It is because of a pure and godly spiritual love for lost mankind that believers share with the lost the good news of salvation by grace through faith in Jesus Christ.

Jesus described Himself as **He who is holy, He who is true**. **Holy** is *set apart*; **true** means *genuine* or *real*. In the context of the letter Jesus is reminding them and us that He was *set apart* from eternity past to come to earth as heaven's missionary to show mankind what is *genuine* and *real* about God.

Jesus has the **Key of David**. It's one of the more than eight hundred references in the Revelation to something in the Old Testament – in this case Isaiah 22:19-24. In the Isaiah passage an unfaithful steward of King Hezekiah, a man named Shebna, is being replaced by a faithful one, a man named Eliakim. The steward of the king wore over his shoulder as a uniform symbol a large key on a chain. It symbolized that he had the power to grant or deny access to the king.

Prophetically this speaks of the nation of Israel in her mission and the church in its mission. Israel proved unfaithful in that the nation rejected Jesus Christ. Israel has been replaced for a time by the church. The church, comprised of saved Gentiles and saved Jews, is currently the Lord's faithful steward. We live in an age in which Christians have the commission to grant access to the King.

Is God through with unfaithful Israel? **No!** Notice it is still the **Key of David**. David was unconditionally promised that he and his physical descendants, the Jews, would have a literal kingdom forever. For a time God has set aside Israel but He will shortly take up dealing with her again.

You and I are the stewards of the Gospel, and Jesus opens doors of ministry for us to grant access to Him:

2 Corinthians 2:12 Furthermore, when I came to Troas to preach Christ's gospel, and a door was opened to me by the Lord,

Colossians 4:3 meanwhile praying also for us, that God would open to us a door for the word, to speak the mystery of Christ...

If you want to be very specific and technical, the **door** is the opportunity to share and spread the Gospel to nonbelievers. We popularly expand the **door** to include other aspects of our walk with Jesus. We talk about God opening or closing doors of employment, where we go to school, church programs, etc. There's nothing wrong with using the analogy as long as we keep our hearts set on serving the Lord and being in the place where He can best use us to reveal His love and grace to others.

Jesus said **HE WHO OPENS AND NO ONE SHUTS, AND SHUTS AND NO ONE OPENS**:

This is a strong statement of God's sovereignty in leading individual Christians and His church. There may be closed doors of service we want to walk through. There may be open doors of service we do not want to walk through. *It's not our call!* We must learn to discover and follow God's leading.

Revelation 3:8 "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 Lord knows **your works**. It means at least two things:

1. He is certainly familiar with what you are doing to serve Him with and through your life.
2. He also knows the **works** He has set before you to discover; and those **works** He has not set before you to pursue.

I especially want to emphasize this second meaning. The Lord has a path for you, a course, custom designed. One of the ways He moves you along His course for your life is by opening and closing doors of opportunity.

Trust Him and try to **See... the open door... set before you...** [that] **no one can shut**. How do you **see** it? What special goggles or glasses are needed?

Before you can **see** it there are at least three prerequisites:

1. You must **have a little strength**. This has been interpreted to mean that the fellowship was small, perhaps with few physical resources. That was probably true. But I see in it a hint of something else. When I am aware that in and of myself I have only **a little strength** then I can believe I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me. When I am weak then am I strong. The first prerequisite is a dependence upon the Holy Spirit.
2. Next I must **have kept** [God's] **Word**. I must hold fast to the authority and inspiration of God's Word. It must be my only rule of life and godliness.
3. Third I must have **not denied** [Jesus'] **name**. It means my behavior has not brought any discredit to the wonderful name of Jesus.

We can approach this as good advice on a daily basis. I humble myself to remember I have little strength and so I am dependant upon the Holy Spirit. I anchor myself to the Word. Then I go out with the empowering of the Spirit and the example of the Word to reveal through my witness the Person of Jesus.

Then and only then am I in a position to **see the doors that are open and the doors that are closed.**

There is an obstacle to my seeing the doors. It is opposition. It can come in many forms but it always skews my vision.

A lot of the opposition in Philadelphia came from the antagonism of the large Jewish population against the Christians.

Revelation 3:9 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.

Jesus calls these first century Jews **those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan**. This is similar to what He told the group of Jews in the eighth chapter of John who accused Him of being illegitimate. *Physically*, they were Jews - the blood descendants of Abraham. But *spiritually* they were of their father the devil. They were the devil's tool as he sought to use them to stamp-out the testimony of Jesus Christ.

Indeed I will make them come and worship before your feet, and to know that I have loved you. Sounds weird! Let me quote John Gill:

The conversion of the Jews is here intended. The worship here spoken of is not either a religious or civil worship of the church, for the church is not the object of worship; only before whom, and at whose feet, this worship shall be given to God in the most humble and hearty manner: the sense is, that the convinced and converted Jews shall come to the church, and in the most lowly and contrite manner acknowledge their former blindness, furious zeal, and violent hatred of the Christians, and shall profess their faith in Christ; shall join themselves to the church, and partake of the ordinances of the Gospel with them; and shall worship God and Jesus Christ, their Lord and King, in their presence, and at their feet.

This certainly fits with what we know of the future. When Jesus returns to earth in His Second Coming all Israel will be saved and join us in worshipping Him.

It certainly fits the context of this letter. Beginning in verse ten the Lord looks ahead to **the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole earth**. We'll see that He was referring to the Great Tribulation during which God draws all Israel to Himself.

The believers at Philadelphia knew what Jesus meant when He spoke of open **doors**. He meant that they had the opportunity to spread the Gospel.

The believers at Philadelphia faced opposition. It was causing them to hesitate.

In some cases you **see** the open door or doors. But there is opposition. It can even come from believers. You should expect opposition whenever and wherever you are serving the Lord. It comes with the territory.

What about those times where you don't see the **open** doors? First of all remember the specific application of this analogy is to the sharing and spreading of the Gospel. It has to do mostly with evangelism. We're the ones who apply it to other areas of our walk.

With regard to evangelism, the apostle Paul gives a good example of how to proceed when you don't **see** the **open** door. In Acts sixteen he kept pressing forward; God kept closing doors until He finally gave Paul the vision of the man from Macedonia saying, **Come over to Macedonia and help us** (Acts 16:9).

What about the other areas of my walk where I want to **see** the doors?

There is a great scene in *The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring* where they come upon the secret door into the mines of Moria. The door is carved in solid rock and can only be seen in moonlight or starlight. Once they see it they need to speak the right word or words for it to open. The inscription over the door reads (in part) "speak friend and enter." They think they must discover a secret word for "friend" and they spend themselves trying to discover it. In the end they need only speak the word "friend" just as written and the door opens! It wasn't so hard after all – **they made it hard!**

We make it hard to **see** whether doors are open or closed because we let our own desires get in the way. We get tunnel vision for the things we want or don't want.

If we are practicing the prerequisites we discussed earlier we will be in a position to **see** open and closed doors. Position is important; but so is your mindset. If your mind is set on serving the Lord in every area of your life the doors will open and close much easier.