



Text
Revelation 3:7-13
The Church in Philadelphia

Topic
Jesus encourages the believers in Philadelphia to continue going through the doors of ministry He has opened.

Title
"Door-To-Door Savior"

"Jesus talked about money more than any other topic."

I've heard that statement, or something similar, dozens of times over the years. It gained popularity because many of Jesus' parables *do* involve money or possessions. Consequently, preachers started repeating statistics like "one-third of Jesus' parables are about money." Gradually this observation evolved into the much broader claim that Jesus discussed money more than anything.

He did not. Money appears in many of His parables as an *illustration*, not as the topic.

What *did* Jesus talk about more than anything else?

The Kingdom of God.

Jesus' public ministry was announced by John the Baptist. "In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea, and saying, 'Repent, for the **Kingdom of Heaven** is at hand.' "¹

¹ Matthew 3:1-2

After John was imprisoned, Jesus "began to preach and to say, 'Repent, for the **Kingdom of Heaven** is at hand.'" ²

"Then Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the Gospel of the **Kingdom**, and healing every sickness and every disease among the people." ³

When Jesus sent out His disciples, His instruction was, "And as you go, preach, saying, 'The **Kingdom of Heaven** is at hand.'" ⁴

His two longest discourses were 100% about the Kingdom:

1. The Sermon on the Mount⁵ is saturated with references to the Kingdom of Heaven. Jesus repeatedly frames His teaching as describing who belongs in the Kingdom and what life in that Kingdom looks like.
2. The Olivet Discourse⁶ describes the events that lead to the Kingdom and the moment it is inaugurated.

Philip's evangelistic preaching in Samaria is explicitly described as Kingdom preaching: "But when they believed Philip as he preached the things concerning the **Kingdom of God** and the name of Jesus Christ, both men and women were baptized." ⁷

The final verse of Acts reads, "Preaching the **Kingdom of God** and teaching the things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ with all confidence." ⁸

In the Revelation we see the consummation: "The Kingdoms of this world have become *the Kingdoms* of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever!" ⁹

² Matthew 4:17

³ Matthew 9:35

⁴ Matthew 10:7

⁵ Matthew 5-7

⁶ Matthew 24 & 25

⁷ Acts 8:12

⁸ Acts 28:31

⁹ Revelation 11:15

The current best estimate is that Jesus spoke of the Kingdom 27% - 30% of the time. That is about on pace with the entire Bible.

Michael Vlach is Professor of Theology at Shepherds Theological Seminary in Cary, NC. He writes, "The Bible's storyline shows how the Kingdom *created* goes to the Kingdom *fallen*, which then leads to the Kingdom *restored*. This storyline is centered and anchored in Jesus the Messiah."

Jesus' letter to the Philadelphians is like a commentary on, "Thy Kingdom Come."

Rev 3:7 To the angel [pastor] of the church in Philadelphia write: These are the words of him who is holy and true, who holds the key of David. What he opens no one can shut, and what he shuts no one can open.

"Him who is holy and true" is used in one other place in the Revelation as a name for "the Sovereign Lord"¹⁰ who will rule Earth.

"The Key of David" represents the promise of the Kingdom. God promised David and Israel that the Messiah would come from the line of David and the tribe of Judah, and that He would establish a Kingdom that would endure forever. Theologians call these promises the Davidic Covenant.

Alva J. McLain wrote, "*The Kingdom promised to David is a real, earthly rule of the Messiah. It is not a mere spiritual sovereignty in the hearts of men, but a government established upon the Earth.*"

The Kingdom Jesus inherits from David is not poetic language. It is a physical throne, a real kingdom, and a reigning King.

The covenant is also unconditional. Even if He wanted to, God cannot abandon Israel for her disobedience.

"Open doors" describes the entire age between Jesus' Ascension to Heaven and His Second Coming. Our responsibility is to recognize the doors of service He opens and walk through them.

¹⁰ Revelation 6:10

The ancient city of Philadelphia was perfect for discussing open doors. Five major roads met there, making it a gateway from the west into Asia and beyond. Rome used it as a missionary city to spread Greek culture throughout the world.

The world is still exporting its beliefs today. How many cases are there where children are being mutilated without the knowledge, and therefore permission, of the parents? How about we concentrate on getting their math scores up!

Rev 3:8 I know your deeds. See, I have placed before you an open door that no one can shut. I know that you have little strength, yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name.

These open doors represent opportunities to take the Gospel to the world as we fulfill the Great Commission: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations..."

Where to go, what to do, and what to say, are all part of seeking the doors Jesus opens. We want to follow Him through those doors.

That doesn't mean we are passive. The apostle Paul didn't always wait for doors to open. In Acts he pressed forward into places the Lord had not opened.

Sometimes you have to try doors. They may open. They may not.

Another thing about doors. Jesus opens them for us. He doesn't just point them out and tell us to go in. We have no strength to open spiritual doors. Even though a door may be yours, or mine, we can attempt to open it ourselves, in our own energy.

They had discovered, and were going through, the open doors of ministry.

Philadelphia's unique situation as a city called for a unique strategy of ministry. How do you best share the Gospel in a hub city like this? How would it be different than other cities?

"For you have little strength."

1. We hear "little strength" and immediately think that the Church was small in number, with very limited resources. That was probably true. Jesus doesn't quantify the way we do. He still works with five loaves and two fishes, if that is all we have; or with a widow's mite, if that is what we give.

2. "Little strength" can also mean a proper humility in understanding that it's not by might, nor by power, that we are to minister; but by the Holy Spirit.

Think of "little strength" as a desirable character trait. In answer to his prayer to be relieved of what he called "a thorn in his flesh, Jesus told Paul, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness." To which Paul surrendered and submitted, observing, "Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong."¹¹

Missionary Hudson Taylor once said, "God is looking for people weak enough to use."

May it be our prayer that we always extol "little strength" - even if or when blessed with abundant resources. We want to be Little Strength Chapel of Hanford.

Jesus commended them, saying, "[you] have kept My Word." They applied the standards and morals of the Bible. They were convinced that everything they needed to live a godly life was there on the pages of God's word.

It is common today for Christians and churches to want to supplement God's Word with something that seems helpful from the world. But in doing so you declare the insufficiency of God's Word.

Let's understand sufficiency & insufficiency. A moment ago I said that everything you need to live a godly life has been given to you. You have the God-breathed Word, and you have something more. Or I should say, Someone more. When you believed you received the in-dwelling presence of God the Holy Spirit.

If you are having marital issues, instruction in the Word is plentiful. God the Holy Spirit, in-dwelling you, enables you to obey God. We say that His Word *is* His enabling. You ought to be able to solve any of your difficulties instantaneously. If not, it isn't that you need a supplemental source of truth or wisdom. It's that you need to continue to seek God.

Jesus commended them by saying, "[you] have not denied My Name." This alerts us that they were being persecuted; that they were being pressured to deny Jesus Christ. They would not deny their Lord - no matter the cost.

¹¹ Second Corinthians 12:9-10

These believers with little strength did big living for the Lord.

One quick observation. Jesus specifically says He had opened a door, not doors. It could be He was addressing a specific thing He had called them to in Philadelphia. The door is the opportunity to share and spread the Gospel to unbelievers. 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, 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.

At least some of the persecution was coming from the folks in verse nine:

Rev 3:9 I will make those who are of the synagogue of Satan, who claim to be Jews though they are not, but are liars - I will make them come and fall down at your feet and acknowledge that I have loved you.

- Since they claim to be Jews but are not, this may refer to Gentiles who think they've replaced Israel. Jehovah's Witnesses, for example, interpret the 144,000 in Revelation¹² as their own members rather than ethnic Jews.
- It could also echo Jesus' words to self-righteous Jews, calling them spiritually of their father, the devil. Either way, they were the main persecutors of the believers in Philadelphia.

It was common in oriental culture to bow low, even to lay down, before a dignitary. It's not worship.

Rev 3:10 Since you have kept my command to endure patiently, I will also keep you from the hour of trial that is going to come on the whole world to test the inhabitants of the earth.

Let's ask & answer two simple questions:

1. What is "the hour of trial that is going to come on the whole world?" The only possible time that qualifies as a specific, future, set period of trouble coming upon the whole world is the seven-year Great Tribulation period.

¹² Revelation 7

2. Does it say that the Lord will keep you safe *in* or *through* "the hour of trial," or keep you *from* it? The Philadelphians were promised they would be "[kept] **from** the hour of trial." The Church must be off earth before it starts. The only way that can happen, biblically, is by the pre-Tribulation resurrection & rapture of the Church!

Jesus distinguishes the Church from "the inhabitants of the Earth." Thus one group is on Earth... *And one is not on Earth!*

Rev 3:11 I am coming soon. Hold on to what you have, so that no one will take your crown.

The "crown" is the victor's wreath. A number of crowns are mentioned in the Bible, and there are probably a lot that aren't. It represents your rewards.

Today we would say, "Hang on to your hats!" Spiritual winds of persecution, false teaching, temptation, can try to steal what's promised. It's a mix of encouragement and warning: stay faithful now, so you receive the ultimate reward later.

Rev 3:12 The one who is victorious I will make a pillar in the temple of my God. Never again will they leave it. I will write on them the name of my God and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which is coming down out of Heaven from my God; and I will also write on them my new name.

Ancient Philadelphia sat in an active earthquake zone and was repeatedly shaken, most famously by a 17AD earthquake, leaving many buildings collapsed.

Residents fled into the streets until the shaking ceased. Looking back to the city, out of the rubble of buildings the pillars were still standing. God uses a fact from their history to predict their strength and security.

Regarding all the writing of names, this reflects cultural habits. Consider the cultural norms we have. Normally a wife assumes her husband's name and resides in his household. She files a change of address, gets a new driver's license.

We are the unique Bride of Jesus. We take His name. It is part of His romance of redemption.

Rev 3:13 Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

Check this out. A person who opens doors is a ???

A **doorman** opens the door, carries the baggage, gives directions, and watches over the entrance.

Jesus does all of this *spiritually*. He opens the door to salvation, carries our burdens, directs our steps, and keeps us secure.