



January 7th, 2025
Week 10

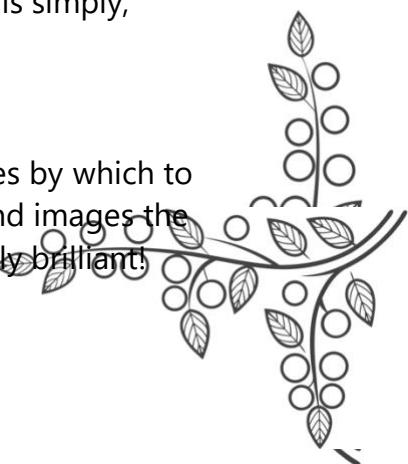
⁷ “Write to the angel of the church in Philadelphia: Thus says the Holy One, the true one, the one who has the key of David, who opens and no one will close, and who closes and no one opens: ⁸ I know your works. Look, I have placed before you an open door that no one can close because you have but little power; yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name. ⁹ Note this: I will make those from the synagogue of Satan, who claim to be Jews and are not, but are lying—I will make them come and bow down at your feet, and they will know that I have loved you. ¹⁰ Because you have kept my command to endure, I will also keep you from the hour of testing that is going to come on the whole world to test those who live on the earth. ¹¹ I am coming soon. Hold on to what you have, so that no one takes your crown.

¹² “The one who conquers I will make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he will never go out again. 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 my new name.

Unlike five of the other messages there is no call to repentance. Instead, Jesus heaps on praise: ***“I know your deeds. You have kept my Word and not denied my name”*** (3:8). The tone of the message is upbeat and positive. The main exhortation is simply, ***“Behold!” “Look!”***

“Look, I have placed before you an open door” (3:8).

In each of the seven messages Jesus chooses specific words and images by which to identify himself. The words and images he chooses hook into words and images the people in the different cities know well. And the way he does it is simply brilliant!



He says to the Philadelphians in verse 12: "***The one who overcomes, I will make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he will not go out from it anymore; and I will write upon 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 my new name***" (3:12).

"You will not go out from it anymore." Philadelphia was situated on the edge of an active volcanic area. This was both a blessing and a curse. On the one hand it meant access to rich, fertile soil and to hot springs. But on the other hand it meant constant danger from earthquakes. Tremors, strong and jolting, were frequent. Whenever a quake struck, the people of Philadelphia would flee the city. When the aftershocks subsided they would return.

The people of Philadelphia were, therefore, "*always going out and coming in; they were always fleeing the city and returning to it.*" Many people, out of fear, left the city every night! "This frightened rhythm of flight and return had become part of their lives."

Jesus knows about life in Philadelphia and says to them: if you remain faithful to me you will enter the city of my God and "will not go out from it anymore." He is saying, I am your _____, I am your unshakable _____. In all your going and coming, your fleeing and returning, I remain the same. My presence with you is not disturbed by geological or economic or political disorder.

"I will write on you the name of the new city." The words "new city" are significant. In a.d. 17, an earthquake leveled Philadelphia and Sardis. The Roman Emperor Tiberias extended kindness and generosity to the city by remitting its taxes and providing huge amounts of money to rebuild the city.

Out of gratitude, Philadelphia changed its name to "Neocaesarea," meaning "the new city of Caesar." Jesus knows that history also and picks up on it. He says, "I will write on you the name of the city of my God, the new city, the new Jerusalem."

"I will make you a pillar." Like the other cities to which Jesus sent his messages, Philadelphia was a religious city. There were so many temples in the city that the other cities called Philadelphia, "Little Athens."

Jesus says to the disciples of that city, "***I will make the one who overcomes a pillar in the temple of my God.***" Jesus is saying that he honors those who are faithful to him by making them pillars in the only temple that lasts, in the temple of the living God. And he



grants "overcomers" the triple honor of bearing the name of his God, the name of the city of his God and his new name.

Listen again to how Jesus speaks of himself. ***"He who is holy, who is true, who has the key of David, who opens and no one will shut, and who shuts and no one opens, says this: I know your deeds. Look! I have put before you an open door which no one can shut"*** (3:7-8).

"Who has the key of David ... I have put before you an open door." To what does this image of "an open door" refer? To what door, or doors, does Jesus, the holy and true, have the keys? There are two possibilities. And, as is often the case in the writings of the apostle John, both possibilities are to be embraced.

The first referent of "open door" is the door of salvation. The phrase "the key of David" comes from a text in the book of Isaiah. In Isaiah 20:20-22 we read this:

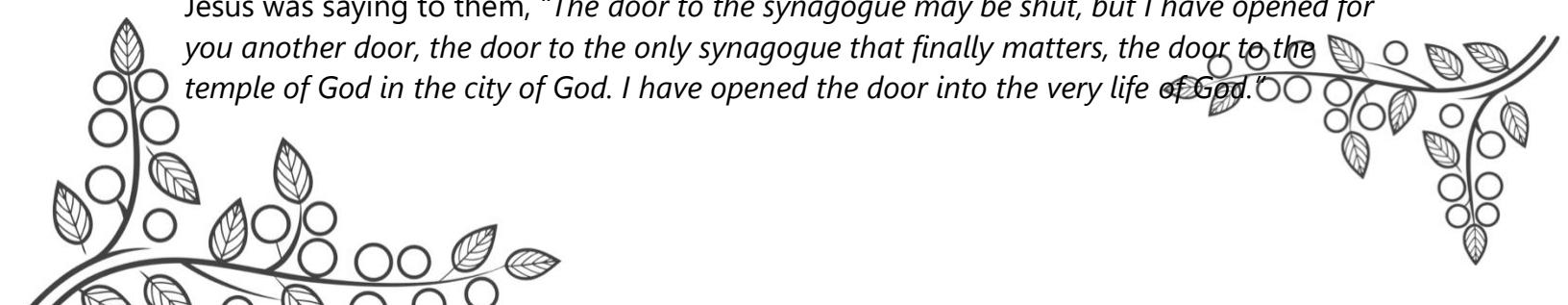
"In that day I will summon my servant Eliakim, son of Hilkiah. I will place on his shoulder the key to the house of David; what he opens, no one can shut, and what he shuts, no one can open."

Eliakim, steward of the riches of King Hilkiah, is given authority to open and shut the door to "the house of David." To what does "the house of David" refer? In reading the rest of Isaiah we discover that "the house of David" is a shorthand way of referring to the kingdom of God, to the city of God, to the temple of God, to all the riches of God the King.

_____ is like Eliakim, a steward, the steward of the great King. In fact, he is the great King. And he has the key, the key of David that unlocks the door to all the riches of the living God. ***"Look! I have put before you an open door."*** By his death and resurrection Jesus has opened the door to all that the living God is and has!

This affirmation would have immediately lifted many of the believers in Philadelphia. Many of the believers were Jews, who because of their faith in Jesus had the door of the synagogue shut in their faces. They had been excommunicated, cursed, persecuted, disowned by family and community.

Jesus was saying to them, ***"The door to the synagogue may be shut, but I have opened for you another door, the door to the only synagogue that finally matters, the door to the temple of God in the city of God. I have opened the door into the very life of God."***



Jesus describes that open door in the Sermon on the Mount. **"Enter through the narrow gate,"** he says, **"for wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it"** (Matt 7:13-14).

Jesus Christ has the keys, the keys of death and Hades (1:18), the keys to the kingdom, the keys of David, and he has opened the gates wide saying, **"Look! I have put before you an open door."**

So, the first referent is to the door of _____ . The second is to the door of _____ . This is how the image is used in other places in the New Testament. The apostle Paul told the Corinthians in his first letter, **"I will stay on at Ephesus until Pentecost, because a great door for effective work has opened for me"** (1 Cor 16:9). He told them in his second letter, **"When I went to Troas to preach the gospel of Christ a door was opened for me in the Lord"** (2 Cor 2:12). And he asked the Colossians to pray **"that God may open a door for our message, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ"** (4:3).

The "open door" is the door of opportunity to tell others about _____ .

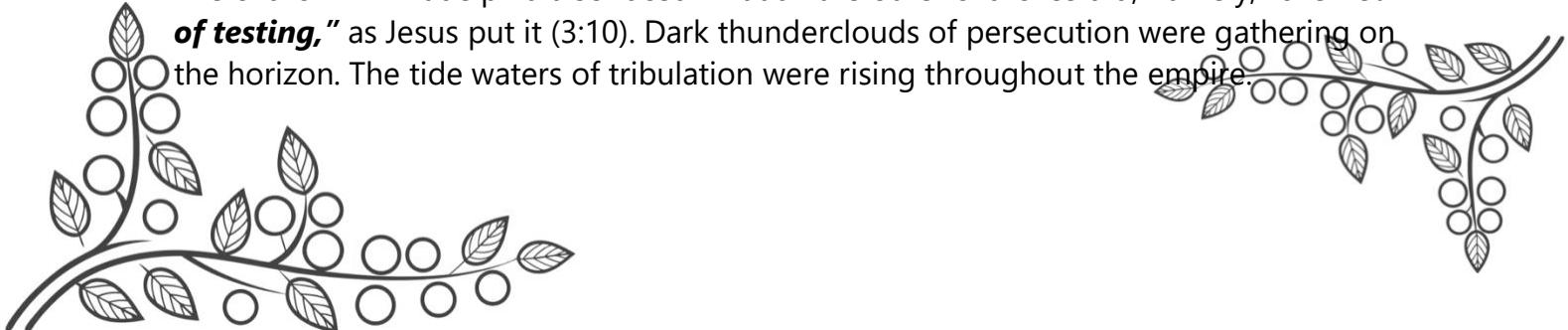
When Jesus sets before the church an open door it does not mean there are no obstacles. After telling the Corinthians of the great door of effective work opened for him in Ephesus, Paul in the next breath says, **"and there are many who oppose me"** (16:9).

Thus the church in Philadelphia faced many obstacles. And, as Jesus himself knew, faced them with "little power" (3:8). Isn't that encouraging?

The church before which Jesus set an open door of opportunity in and of itself lacked the resources to overcome the obstacles. That is the way it should be, for as we saw again in the message to Sardis, the Christian life cannot be lived apart

Without him we have "little power." And he is always calling the church into mission beyond our resources so that we have to depend on him.

The church in Philadelphia also faced what all the other churches did, namely, **"the hour of testing,"** as Jesus put it (3:10). Dark thunderclouds of persecution were gathering on the horizon. The tide waters of tribulation were rising throughout the empire.



Again, in the face of this, the church could have given in to the temptation to retreat, to hunker down and protect itself during the storm. "No," said the Lord of the church. "*The door of opportunity is open.*" This is not a time to play it safe.

Besides, playing it safe is never safe! For when the church goes into the "huddle" mode something insidious starts happening. Max Lucado tells of the time his dad took him and a friend fishing only to have it rain and snow and have to spend a week cooped up in a camper truck, bickering and griping.

"I learned a hard lesson that week," he writes, Not about fishing, but about people. When those who are called to fish don't fish, they fight. When energy intended to be used outside is used inside, the result is explosive. Instead of casting nets, we cast stones. Instead of extending helping hands, we point accusing fingers. Instead of being fishers of the lost, we become critics of the saved. Rather than helping the hurting, we hurt the helpers.

The result? Church scrooges. 'Bah, humbug' spirituality. Beady eyes searching for warts on others while ignoring the warts on the nose below. Crooked fingers that bypass strengths and point out weaknesses. Split churches. Poor testimonies. Broken hearts. Legalistic wars.

And, sadly, poor go unfed, confused go uncounseled and lost go unpreached. When those who are called to fish don't fish, they fight. The next time the challenges 'outside' tempt you to shut the door and stay inside, stay long enough to get warm. Then get out. When those who are called to fish don't fish, they fight."

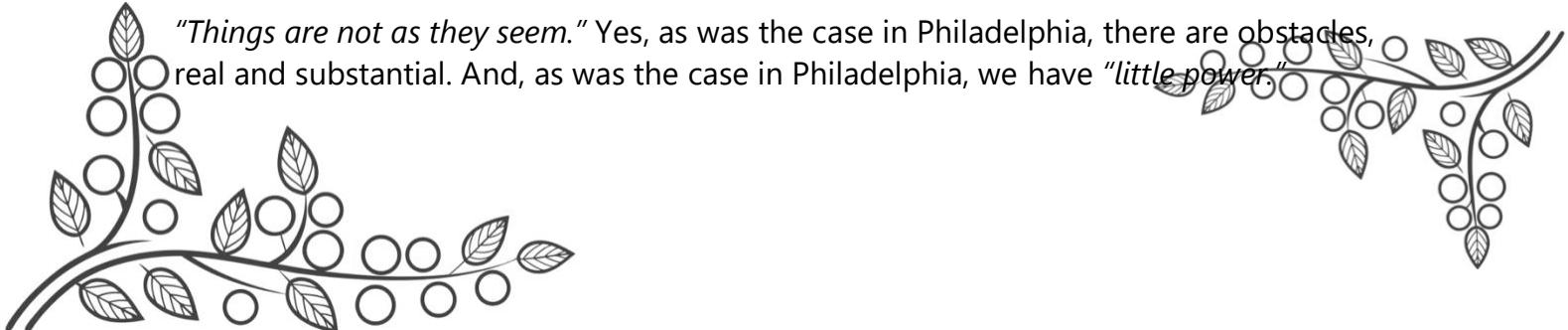
"**Look!**" says Jesus. "I have put before you an open door, now go for it!"

No time for huddling, even in the face of opposition.

Sir William Ramsey wrote: "Philadelphia was a missionary city from the beginning." A missionary city for everything Greek! "**I have set before you an open door.**" From now on the city would be a base for the launching of a new campaign, the campaign to _____ the world. It would now be a missionary city for the kingdom of Jesus Christ.

Is Jesus not making the same claim for your city, and my city? Does he not want to make it a platform from which to gospelize the world? Look! I have put before you an open door of _____.

"*Things are not as they seem.*" Yes, as was the case in Philadelphia, there are obstacles, real and substantial. And, as was the case in Philadelphia, we have "*little power.*"



But, as was the case in Philadelphia, the obstacles and little power finally do not matter. For Jesus is moving in our cities, and he has the keys! And he says, ***"I have set before you an open door which no one can shut."***

How that phrase changes the whole picture! "No one can shut." Once Jesus opens a door no one can shut it!

Will you go through the door? Maybe you have never gone through the open door of salvation. Do it today. Stand up and walk through it. Jesus is standing before you with open arms. You can do it right now. If you have gone through the open door of salvation, will you now stand up and walk through the open door of opportunity?

"Look!" It is a command. The only command Jesus gives in the text. Look! An open door that no one can shut. How can anyone not walk through it?

*Written portions are taken from "Discipleship on the Edge" by Darrell W. Johnson.

