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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes

INTRODUCTION

As we get over into Revelation chapters 4 and 5, we’ll see the scene in heaven where you and I will be after Jesus comes back. We are going to see that Jesus is worthy to be praised. Only the Lamb is worthy. Today we come to the sixth of the seven churches that received letters from the Lord Jesus Christ.

By way of review, the book of Revelation easily divides itself into three separate parts: the past, the present and the future. In Revelation, 1:19 Jesus says to John, “Write the things which you have seen” (the past) John saw a vision of the resurrected, glorified Jesus. Then Jesus said, “Write the things which are” (present tense) and John wrote about the seven churches as the Holy Spirit inspired him. Those seven churches picture all Christians of all the ages including right now. But as we move to chapter 4, the entire remainder of the book is in the future tense. Prophecy about what is going to happen when Jesus comes back. Today, we’re looking at the church in Philadelphia and talk about the kind of church God blesses.

“To the angel 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. 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. 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 you have kept my command to endure patiently, I will also keep you from the hour of trial that is going to come upon the whole world to test those who live on the earth.

I am coming soon. Hold on to what you have, so that no one will take your crown. Him who overcomes I will make a pillar in the temple of my God. Never again will he leave it. I will write on him 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 him my new name. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”

Of all of the seven churches, this is the only church of the seven that does not receive a rebuke from the Lord. This is what you might call a church that is really blessed. Most of us know what that name *Philadelphia* means, because we know of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. It comes from two Greek words *philos* for “love” and *adelphos* for “brothers.” Philadelphia means “the place where the brothers love one another a place of brotherly love.” This was a very small, insignificant community in Asia Minor and it was not nearly as important as Ephesus or Sardis or some of these other places, but this is the location of a group of believers although they only had a little bit of strength, God was blessing them and he was using them. If we want to be a certain kind of church of all of these seven churches, we as members of Green Acres Baptist Church we want to be like the church at Philadelphia.

I. THE PICTURE OF THE SAVIOR

1. His Character: Holy and True

First of all, look at the portrait of Jesus the Savior. "These are the words of him who is holy and true." The first thing we notice is his character. The Bible says Jesus is "holy and he is true." What are the opposites of those? Sin, deception, dishonesty? The Bible says that is totally contrary to the character and nature of Jesus Christ. He is holy, which means he is different than any other person who has ever lived and he always speaks the truth! He said, "I am the truth!" He says, "I am the truth" and when you ask the right questions, he will give you the truth! So as he begins this letter, he says, "Listen! What I am telling you is absolutely true! You can write it down!"

2. His conduct: He opens and shuts

Secondly, notice his conduct in this picture. He is seen as holy and true but then it says "He holds the key of David. What he opens, no man can shut and what he shuts, no man can open." In the Old Testament, you will find there was a time when some of the priests stole from the temple treasury and King David got very upset, so he called out one of the most trusted men in his army, Elkanah, and he gave him the one key the temple treasury. He said, "I give you the key to this and you only open it when I tell you to open it and you only close it when I tell you to close it." What the Bible is saying here is just as David was King, Jesus Christ is the Messiah. We see his royalty here. He is King over all the earth. He has the key of David. He opens from heaven all of the riches God can give to us. He not only has the key he IS the key, to salvation and to understanding the scriptures and you can find him on every page of your Bible. He says, "Whatever I open, no man can shut." God sometimes opens doors of opportunities for a church and for individuals and I'm here to tell you that when he opens a door, no person can shut it. You may not walk through it, but you cannot shut it. He also says, "When I shut the door, no man can open it."

I am reminded of what took place in Matthew 25, when Jesus told the story of the ten maidens; five were foolish and five were wise. It's a picture of those people who at the second coming of Jesus Christ really possess what they profess—they have oil in their lamp signifying the Holy Spirit. When the bridegroom came, only five of them could light their lamps and enter in. The bridegroom shut the door and the other five pounded on the door and said, "Let us in! Let us in!" and he said, "No, I have shut the door and it cannot be opened." Ladies and gentlemen there will come a time when the door of salvation is going to be shut and no man can open it. I'm happy to tell you today the door of salvation is still open for you. If you want to accept Jesus Christ, the door is open and you can walk through it tonight but the time is going to come when he will shut the door and although some people may stand on the outside like they did in Matthew, 25, and pound on the door and say, "Let us in! Let us in!" he'll say, "No, the door has been shut." So that's the picture of the Savior, his character and his conduct.

II. THE PROVISION FOR SERVICE: An open door of opportunity

Notice the provision for service. This church has often been called, "The Church of the Open Door." Look at verse 8, "See I have set before you an open door that no man can shut." He made a provision for their service. He said to this little congregation of believers in Philadelphia "I have opened a door of opportunities and you need to walk through it." God opens doors for individuals and he opens doors for churches. Let's talk about individuals first. God has a specific

plan and purpose for your life. One of the ways you can discern what that plan is as you go through life you will find a series of doors. Here's the problem! There's not just one door—sometimes there are several doors.

I can remember when I was in junior high school, I read a story in literature. I don't even remember who wrote it. Some of you, perhaps, can help me remember. It was a story by Frank R. Stockton called, "The Lady, or the Tiger?" The story took place in ancient days. There was a man who was in an arena who had been given the punishment of walking through one of two doors. Behind one door was a beautiful lady; behind the other door was a hungry, ferocious tiger. Then there was a sub-plot. Seated right above the two doors was the king's daughter, who was the lover of the man who had to choose which door to walk through. At the climax of the story she looked at the man who had to make the choice and she looked at one of the doors. That was one of those stories where you never knew what happened, because it didn't end the question we always had to ask was, "What was she doing and what door did he walk through?" Was she so taken in her love for him that she looked at the door with the tiger behind it thinking, "If I can't have him, nobody can. Let him die." or did she love him so much she was willing to give him up for another woman and she looked at the door with the beautiful woman behind it? We don't know the story just ends and you put your own ending on it yourself.

Those two doors teach us a lesson because the Bible says God opens doors before us, but sometimes there are two doors before us and both of them may appear open. The question we face is, "Which door do we walk through?" The Bible says about temptation, "There is no temptation that has taken you but that which is common among men." In other words, every temptation you face, somebody else has also. Then it says, "but God is faithful. He will not suffer you to be tempted beyond what you are able to handle, but he will with the temptation also make a way (in this case, *way* means "pathway") to escape it." (1 Corinthians 10:13) So every time you are tempted to sin, there are two doors. Behind one door is Satan's bait and behind the other door is the way to escape temptation—the choice is yours. Which door do you walk through? Our lives are a series of going through and confronting these doors.

There have been a lot of doors in my life. I can recall when I walked through the door of salvation and entered into the kingdom of God. I can remember when I walked through the door of God calling me to preach. I can remember as I have walked through the doors to the different places I have gone in terms of schools and churches and I have always faced the decision "Which door am I to walk through?" It's a tough decision. If you are walking in the flow of the spirit of God, He'll be directing you through the right door. So what door are you standing before right now? Is it in terms of ministry? Is it in terms of vocation? Is it in terms of a very important choice you must make? God will open a door for you if you'll only look for it.

God also opens doors for churches. He opens what we call an "open door of opportunity." I believe God has opened a great door of opportunity for Green Acres Baptist Church. He has been opening doors through the years and this church has faithfully walked through an open door of opportunity. One of the doors of opportunity about which I am most excited right now is what God is doing overseas in our mission work. I can recall as an RA (Royal Ambassador) going to my little home church and looking at the world map on the wall that showed where we had Southern Baptist missionaries. There was one color on the map for places where we had

missionaries and then there was one color on the map of a country where we could not send missionaries. I can remember looking at that large mass of land we call the former Soviet Union and thinking how terrible it was that there were so many people, but we couldn't take the gospel there. The door is closed! One of the greatest joys of my life is to have witnessed in my own lifetime God opening the door of opportunity. He not only opened the door he ripped it off its hinges. I believe it was not some political ideology that brought the Berlin Wall down. I believe it was the prayer of godly people that tore down that wall! God opened the door! You can read about it in the papers. The Russian Federation sent their Education Minister over here to America and he is asking Christians to come to the former Soviet Union and teach Bible morality in the public schools. The amazing has really happened. The door of opportunity is more wide open to take the gospel into schools in a former Communist nation than it is in our own nation! I want to stand before you here tonight and I want to make another prediction. I'm not a prophet, nor the son of a prophet but God is a God who answers prayers and we are going to see the door to Red China open. I believe in just a matter of months or maybe a matter of years we'll be sending mission teams to China with the good news of Jesus Christ, because I believe God is going to open that door also. God is a God who opens doors and that's what he said to this little church in Philadelphia. "You have an open door in front of you which I have provided for your service."

III. THE PRAISE FOR THEIR STRENGTH

Notice the praise for their strength. "I've set before you an open door no man can shut it. I know that you have a little strength yet you have kept my word and you have not denied my name." In verse 10 he says, "Since you have kept my command to endure patiently."

1. Their perseverance: "kept my word"

What can you say about this little church? First, notice their perseverance. Even though they only had a little bit of strength, they did not give up. I want you to think about that phrase "a little strength." I think one of the problems some of us have is that we have too much strength for God to use us. When Paul was talking about a "thorn in the flesh" 2 Corinthians, he said, "There is some messenger of Satan that buffets me... This has made me miserable this thorn in the flesh and I have prayed three times 'God, take it away!' 'God, take it away!' 'God, take it away!' and God said, "No! I'm not going to do it!" Then this Paul said, "God told me that his strength would be made perfect in my weakness." It is only when we recognize we only have a little bitty amount of strength that his strength can flow through us. There are some Christians who have so much money so much intelligence so much natural ability they don't really feel like they need God's strength. They have everything handled. There are some churches like the church at Laodicea that say, "I am rich! I am increased with goods and I have need of nothing!" Jesus said, "What you don't know is you are poor and miserable and blind and naked." You see sometimes when we have too much human strength and too much in terms of human resources, God's strength cannot flow through us but he said, "Because you have a little strength and you are hanging on and you are persevering and you are not giving up I am going to bless you tremendously."

I am learning so much more about God. God has just been doing some neat things in my life as I begin to discover more and more of how he operates. The other day he brought me to that

passage again that I had read many times over in the book of Judges, where Gideon gathered the huge 30,000 man army and God whittled it down to 300 men—a little group of guys—but the group of 30,000 was too big and too strong for God to use. He had to narrow it down until it would be an absolute miracle, and when he did, *God* got the glory not the army. If an army of 30,000 people had won the battle, they would have gotten the credit, but when an army of only 300 people won the battle, God got the credit! We have to remember God is always going to take the path that gives him the greatest glory! So maybe you think, "I don't have much strength! Pastor, I'm just barely hanging on. Sometimes I don't think I'm going to make it through the day." Good for you! Because if you have a little strength, God will bless that strength.

2. Their profession: "you haven't denied my name"

Secondly he praises them for their profession. "You have not denied my name." Every year, citizens of the Roman Empire were called upon to burn incense and publicly say, "Caesar is Lord," and in order to be hired for a job in order to be a part of an occupational vocational guild, their version of a trade union. These Christians in Philadelphia said, "We're not going to do it! We're not going to say Caesar is Lord. We're only going to say Jesus is Lord!" Have you ever been guilty of denying the name of Jesus like Peter did? When you go to school or you go to a job or you're around some of your friends who are not Christians, have you been guilty of denying you even know Jesus by your activity and by what you say? He praised this little church because they kept on naming the name of Jesus.

IV. THE PROTECTION FOR THE SAINTS

1. From their enemies—the synagogue of Satan

Notice the protection for the saints. This is where it really gets good and this is the great promise. He says, "Because you are faithful and you are hanging on and you are giving up and you are walking through that open door of opportunity, I promise protection to you." Number one he says, "I promise protection from your enemies. I will make those who are of the synagogue of Satan who claim to be Jews, though they are not, but are liars I'm going to make them come and fall down at your feet and acknowledge that I have loved you." What is the synagogue of Satan? There were some people even in this good church who were professing to be children of God but Jesus said, "I know who they are. They are of the synagogue," in other words, the assembly of Satan.

In Matthew 13, Jesus tells the parable of the sower, about the wheat and the tares. Jesus comes and he plants the good seed, the word of God, and it sprouts up in the lives of Christians. But Jesus went on to say Satan always slips in and plants evil seed that come up as weeds, and they look like wheat. So in every church, just like this good church in Philadelphia, just like in Green Acres Baptist Church, just like every church I have ever known, there are the good seed—proven, genuine Christians and there are some who are of the synagogue of Satan—the weeds. These people don't know it. They don't say, "I represent the devil and I'm a secret agent." They're just not genuine. They have a profession without a possession. In Matthew 13 the servants wanted to go out and cut out all the weeds. "Let's pull 'em up by the roots and get rid of them!" But Jesus said, "No don't do that! Just let them go and in the end at the end time when I send my angels

they are going to do the harvesting and they'll do the dividing up." It's a dangerous attitude to try to go in and uproot those people like that, because we don't know who they are. You may suspect and you may think, but I have a sneaking suspicion everyone of us is going to be very surprised when we get to heaven. We are going to see some people there we did not expect to see, and we're not going to see some we expected to see there. So it's a dangerous attitude to say, "I know which ones are the weeds!"

Another reason you shouldn't root them up is because you might mess up some of the good wheat when you do that. So the Bible says we live with it. Right there in this good church in Philadelphia with an open door, there were those of the synagogue of Satan and Jesus said, "In the end these enemies of my cause are going to come and kneel before you and they're not going to worship you. "They're going to fall down at your feet. They're not going to acknowledge that I've loved you." That is a promise to every true child of God, so be patient and wait.

One of my favorite characters in the Old Testament is Joseph, the man with the coat of many colors. Joseph got in all kinds of trouble because of his dreams. He awoke one morning and said to his family, "I had a dream last night and each one of us was represented by a bundle of wheat and there in my dream my bundle stood up and all the rest of the bundles all you fell down. Then, those bundles bowed before me." It made his father and his brothers angry. The next morning he got up and said, "I had another dream last night. I was the moon and you were the sun and the stars, and you came and bowed down before me and worshiped me." I'll bet that made for a good breakfast! No wonder they sold him into slavery with dreams like that! But his brothers, who became his enemies, sold him off into slavery and went back and told his father he was dead. He went to Egypt for 40 or 50 or 60 years and ends up on the throne in Egypt. Then famine comes to the land and Joseph's brothers come to where he is and did exactly what Joseph dreamed that they would do years before—they bowed down before him. They didn't recognize him, but they bowed down before him and acknowledged God had blessed him. Heaven and earth may pass away, but God's word will never pass away. When God makes a promise, you can count on it. He says, "I will protect you from your enemies in the end." He did not necessarily promise we would be vindicated in this lifetime, but I love what Vance Havner says about this: "The greatest friend of truth is time. Error is always in a hurry, but God's servant can afford to await the vindication of time. If he is not vindicated in his own lifetime, eternity will settle the score."

2. From the end—from the hour of tribulation

Number two he says, "I will protect you from the end." It gets a little confusing, but this is what's going to happen. I believe in terms of eschatology (the end of the world), we are now living in the church age. Jesus Christ is going to come back at any moment and he's going to rapture the church. The church, the bride of Christ, is going to be taken to his Father's house in heaven. Then, there are going to be seven years of Tribulation on the earth. Not every Christian believes we're going to be taken out before the Tribulation. Some of you who have studied it already know that. There are some Christians who believe Christians are going to live through the Tribulation. Some believe we will be taken out halfway through, after three and a half years. Some believe we're going to live all seven years of it! I believe the Bible teaches Christians are going to be raptured out of this world before the Tribulation begins. Because that's what Jesus

says here in verse 10. This is very important if you want to believe what I am describing to you. "Since you have kept my command to endure patiently, I will keep you from the hour of Tribulation, *thlipsis*. Couldn't it just be talking about the personal troubles you go through? Keep reading. He said, "This is Tribulation that is going to come upon the whole earth (the entire planet) to test those who live on the earth." Jesus says to this church, "Because you folks are enduring patiently, I'm going to protect you and I'm going to keep you from it, because you have kept my word." What is this terrible time of Tribulation he is talking about? In Matthew 24, we read Jesus says. He talks about "a time that's coming on the earth for then there shall be great Tribulation unequalled from the beginning of the world until now and it will never be equaled again." There is going to be a time of Tribulation and Jesus says to the church, "I am going to keep you from it. I am going to make sure that you do not have to go through it. I'm going to protect you from it."

The main question is "Have you been born again?" Are you part of the body? Are you part of the bride of Christ? Are you going to be kept and protected from this time of Tribulation? Believe me, you *don't* want to be alive when it happens. God has an open door for us. Philadelphia was the church of the open door. Laodicea, which we will study next, was the church of the closed door. Jesus said to the church at Laodicea, "I'm standing on the outside. Behold, I'm standing at the door and I am knocking Let me in Let me in." There are open door Christians and there are closed door Christians. If you will make a commitment to be like these Christians at Philadelphia and walk through that open door he gives to you, he says, "I'll protect you and I'll keep you from the end." That's the kind of church God blesses and God, help us to be that kind of church!

OUTLINE

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1. His Character: Holy and True
2. His conduct: He opens and shuts

II. THE PROVISION FOR SERVICE (v. 8)

An open door of opportunity

III. THE PRAISE FOR THEIR STRENGTH (v. 8, 10)

1. Their perseverance: "you kept my word" (v. 10)
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IV. THE PROTECTION FOR THE SAINTS (v. 9-13)

1. From their enemies—the synagogue of Satan
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