



Going Deeper - Weekly Sermon Discussion Guide

Revelation: The Seven Churches - 4/18/2021

The Church of Philadelphia

"I have placed before you an open door that no one can shut."

Rev. 3:8

In Revelation 3:7-13 we read the letter to the sixth of seven churches, the church of Philadelphia. To each church John provides a commendation, confronts them with a complaint, and provides corrections to compel them to get back on track. Last week when we looked at the letter to the church of Sardis, we found that the message was missing a commendation. This week, as we look at Philadelphia's letter we find that there is no complaint, although the commendation wasn't really something to brag about. Without a complaint, there isn't a particular need to be corrected and get back on track. In this letter, we see the affirmation of a relationship with God and we see how that leads to affirmations of hope.

"I know you have little strength, yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name." It feels a little like a backhanded compliment: 'You've hung in there, even if you are a little weak and puny', and yet I find this so encouraging. God says, "I know your deeds - I see you! You're not very strong, but you have endured patiently, you have kept my word, and you have not denied me." That sounds loving and affirming. God speaks to Paul in 2 Corinthians 12: 8 saying, "...my power is made perfect in weakness." Not being strong was not a problem for the people of Philadelphia or for Paul and so it should not be a problem for us when we endure patiently.

And then Jesus offered something both compelling and intriguing, "I have placed before you an open door that no one can shut." As you read the Scripture passage, you will see that the door is neither explained nor described; but if Jesus is offering to keep it open for you, it must be good. An open door provides anticipation and opportunity, a future. This isn't offered to everybody, it is offered to those who are anchored in the authority of Jesus. He provides hope and visions for the future. What did they have to do? They were encouraged to acknowledge their weakness and embrace it.

1 John 5:3 is interpreted in the Living Bible as, "Loving God means doing what he tells us to do, and really, that isn't hard at all." When I read the letter to the Church of Philadelphia, that verse seems to sum it up. Jesus says, I know your deeds, I know you well, and you are the one I love. Hold on to what you have, hold on to the little strength you have and I will write my name on you, because you belong to me.

So consider.

1. Doing what God tells us to do means to be anchored in his authority. What does that mean to you? Do you find this to be easy or difficult? What is your role in the process of becoming anchored in Him?
2. Paul was able to acknowledge his weakness and see how it is a strength in the Kingdom of God. How do you see yourself? We so often strive to be independent and self-sufficient in our lives, being strong is a virtue in our culture. Do you differentiate between being weak spiritually but being strong in every other way? Is there weakness that you can acknowledge and embrace? How might this deepen your relationship with God?
3. Has God placed an open door before you? Does this give you hope? What visions would that provide for your future? For the future of the Kingdom? For the future of our world?

Take Action: This week meditate on John 3:30, "He must increase, I must decrease." What would that look like in your life? How do you differ from the members of the church of Philadelphia? What would make the letter to those members relevant to you today?

May the grace and peace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. ~Tess