

See! – The Open Door of Opportunity

Revelation 3:7-13

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(NIVUK) 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.'

I think reading these letters to the seven churches reminds me a little of reading a school report. What would God say in our All Saints Weston school report?

It leads us to a small but vital point about how to read Revelation – as timeless Jewish meditation literature with a message for its first century audience and an equally relevant message for us today. Every generation since the point it was first recorded can read Revelation symbolically, politically, powerfully; every age can explore what Schussler Fiorenza called this book's "symphony of images" and find new meaning. The question for us this morning is...what would God say to us as a congregation and individually from what he says to this church in Philadelphia?

So, this church has “kept my word” and they have “not denied my name”. That’s good, right?

But... “I know your deeds”, says God. “I know you have little strength” says God. This is...less good

Does He follow it with condemnation, outrage, frustration, disappointment?

No. He offers Philadelphia love.

Read the promises he gives them...

- Reveal the truth not now known – v9
- Visibly demonstrate the love that has always been there – v9
- Protection – v10
- “I am coming soon” – v11
- Make you a pillar – v12
- ‘You’ll never leave my presence’ – v12
- Will name you, claim you and give you a new identity – v12
- A gift to you that seals you within God’s family – v12

I wonder how *you're* feeling.

We might not have a lot of faith – trust – hope – love – belief – prayer.
And we might have a lot of doubt – worry – anxiety – questions of unbelief
– anger – hurt – shame.

I'm told not to fear, yet I am full of it.

And here's the thing, it's hard to admit that in church sometimes because we think we're not supposed to feel like that so we go through the motions and hope to goodness no one will notice but God says..."I know your deeds."

That's worth dwelling on: "I know you." "I know."

God also knows "you have kept my word and have not denied my name"
– You've kept going, kept faithful even when it was the very last fingertips of faith and the message of this passage is God's incredible exchange.

We bring very, very little to the table when we meet with God. Even on our best days and certainly on our worst. We bring what little we have: our widow's mite, our mustard seed, our loaves and fishes and we exchange for life to the full, love beyond measure, the full measure of Christ, Jesus-level purity, perfection & holiness. This treasure is given to us.

We live in a world that values strength, power, performance and independence. It looks down upon weakness, need, low status and dependency... and yet THIS kingdom is one where the weak are loved...

Hebrews 4:14-16 reads...

Hebrews 4:14-16

(NIVUK) ¹⁴ Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has ascended into heaven, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. ¹⁵ For we do not have a high priest who is unable to feel sympathy for our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are – yet he did not sin. ¹⁶ Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.

Jesus can **“empathise with our weaknesses”** so approach him with **“confidence”** to receive the **“mercy”** and the **“grace”** we'll need to **“help us in our time of need”**.

And THIS is the kingdom where the weak are made strong – and not in some superficial self-help way but because our strength is in God....

2 Corinthians 12:9

(NIVUK) ⁹ But he said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.' Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me.

I need to be reminded of this because I so often try to go it alone. I'm so much better off when I face my weakness and embrace God's strength instead.

Revelation references, makes allusions to, interacts with and corresponds with the book of Isaiah so beautifully. So it's fitting, I think, to be reminded of God's loving message to those of little strength there. And if you feel of little strength right now, please hear this:

2 Corinthians 12:9

(NIVUK) ²⁸ Do you not know? Have you not heard? The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He will not grow tired or weary, and his understanding no one can fathom. ²⁹ He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak. ³⁰ Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall; ³¹ but those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.

I don't know about you. but I want to soar on wings like eagles! 😊

If we just go back to our verse in Revelation a moment: "See, I have placed before you an open door that no one can shut". Let's talk about this open door.

1) The door as Jesus' salvation

A word about syntax: note also that the open door comes FIRST In this passage(v8). The door was opened wide *before* the summary of how the church in Philadelphia was doing. *Because God's gift of love and life and open doors is there BEFORE we do or achieve or manage or sustain or cling on to anything.* It does *not* depend on us, and it does not ever close because of something we have or have not done.

Let's be clear on that. The door isn't opened if you're doing a cracking job...it's just open. The door isn't closed if you mess up....it remains open. The open door depends on the love and loyalty of God and that is a door nobody can close.

It's radical because it reminds us afresh that this faith we profess is not one about merit or deserving but based on the always undeserved love of God for us. And it's THAT which sustains us.

I'm going to underline that point again....

This door does not depend on you; it hinges on the love and goodness of God.

2) The door is more than a door to heaven...

We can say this open door is an invitation to life with Jesus – that's a door that never closes. But the invitation to live life with Jesus is not just for after death, it really is, it really always was and always is, an invitation to LIVE, now and in the present, with Jesus as the source and sustainer of life. We can exchange our weakness, our weariness, for the stability, hope, purpose and meaning that we receive from Jesus. It's the best deal you'll ever make.

If we can surrender what little we've got, our 5 loaves and 2 fish, our mustard seed, our widow's mite...if we can lay down our weaknesses in service to the King...then we'll pick up life lived to the full.

3) The open door of opportunity.

The door can be seen as representing the opportunities in this life for us to bring in the kingdom.

The thing is that I so often want that to be an escape. We think of open doors culturally as being about escaping into new and wonderful futures and horizons. And you know, sometimes in scripture that's true. We can think of Peter in Acts 12 when the night before Herod was going to bring Peter out before the people, the prison gates were opened by an angel and Peter walked free. But then we think of Paul in Philippi as told in Acts 16 when there was an earthquake and the prison doors opened but Paul and Silas knew it was better to stay and convert the prison guard.

So, I have come to see this open door differently. After all, for John, recording this vision in the 1st Century, he knew that first hand. John is exiled to the Roman penal colony of Patmos – a small rocky island in the Aegean sea. And it is THERE where God will give him the vision.

Open doors on Patmos do not lead to miraculous departure, open doors lead to meeting Jesus in the midst of Roman exile. Open doors to glimpses of the divine in the midst of the misery of Patmos. Classic Jesus – sometimes the closest encounters are in our bleakest places – have you ever noticed that?

So, I have come to see this open door is an invitation to radically rethink the place I am, the now and the here. The open door of opportunity in the Christ-led life sometimes leads to new places and people but often, perhaps most often, it doesn't lead elsewhere – it isn't on us to await some door to another church or another job or another family or another marriage or another friend or another city... instead Jesus invites us to the door to opportunities that is right here, right now. It leads us to another way of seeing the world we are in – it's the opportunity to live this life, in the here and now, with God and in God's strength. To reorganise, reprioritise, to reimagine this life, in the here and now, creatively with its creator. It's classic Jesus: reinterpreting that which seemed hopeless to make it more than we could ever ask or imagine. That door is always, always open to us.

Philippians 4:10-14

(MSG) 10-14 Whatever I have, wherever I am, I can make it through anything in the One who makes me who I am.

It's what God does with us. He doesn't exchange bad you for new you; He works over a lifetime through the Holy Spirit to renovate and restore you. It's a lifetime's labour of love that will be perfected in the next life. He has not given up on you, no matter how weak you are no matter how little you bring.

So...what is the message to us? Come closer? Trust deeper? Lean in more? Pray? What does it mean to you to admit you've not got a lot to bring, but you are still bringing all that you've got. What does it mean to you today to walk through that open door or invitation...to go deeper?

Some words of encouragement from 2 Corinthians 3 and 4 from THE MESSAGE translation. Paul, in Peterson's translation, writes so effusively, so full of joy about his weakness and strength in God...using that beautiful imagery of us being jars of clay with all the cracks that let God's power shine through. Our very weaknesses are where God pours out...

What Jesus has done in opening the door to God for us means there is “nothing between us and God, our faces shining with the brightness of his face. And so we are transfigured much like the Messiah, our lives gradually becoming brighter and more beautiful as God enters our lives and we become like him.”

“If you only look at us you might well miss the brightness. We carry this precious Message around in the unadorned clay pots of our ordinary lives. That’s to prevent anyone from confusing God’s incomparable power with us. As it is, there’s not much chance of that. You know for yourselves that we’re not much to look at. We’ve been surrounded and battered by troubles, but we’re not demoralised; we’re not sure what to do, but we know that God knows what to do; we’ve been spiritually terrorised, but God hasn’t left our side; we’ve been thrown down, but we haven’t broken.”

And “What they did to Jesus they do to us – trial and torture, mockery and murder; what Jesus did among them he does in us – he lives!”... “So we’re not giving up. How could we! Even though on the outside it often looks like things are falling apart on us, on the inside, where God is making new life, not a day goes by without his unfolding grace.”

Let us pray for daily unfolding grace.



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