



I had a painting of Jesus in my room while I was growing up. He was standing before a closed door, the door to my heart and yours.

And notice the door is closed, like it was for John the Baptist. Now, I'm not talking about the glory days of John, the ones we've been hearing about in church this Advent season. I'm not thinking about the 100s and 1000s of people going out to the desert to hear his message or the many baptisms or the powerful sermons. Those were the glory days when everything was going right, when everyone was listening to his sermons, when that he was preparing the way for the Savior of the world to come.

But now John is sitting in prison, behind closed doors, behind locked doors. Do you remember why? He stood before the king and told them that he could not, would not, permit him to take his brother's wife as his own. And now John sat behind closed doors wondering, why? when? What did he do wrong? Wasn't he just doing what God called him to do? Or as he sent messengers to ask Jesus the question behind it all: "Are you the one who was to come, or should we expect someone else?"

You've been there to, behind closed doors:

- When an opportunity at work or at school or for love, seemed wide open and but then shut you out.
- Or your health isn't so good and keeps you in home or in bed or you hear those dreaded words like one of our sisters in Christ heard today, "Your cancer is back." (please pray for Shirley Hubbard).
- Maybe a son doesn't pick up the phone to call home or a relative or a friend has closed the door on your relationship.

You've been there...

- And certainly you yourself have closed the door a time or two and for sure a time or two too many on your Lord. And pushed up hard against it in your rebellion, because that is what sin is, a door that shuts you off from your God.

That's why you need to hear what Jesus told John's disciples, "Go back and report to John what you hear and see: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised and the good news is preached to the poor." That was Jesus opening the door for John and for you and for me. He is the One who has come and who is coming again to open the door to life and forgiveness and hope.

Permit me a few minutes tonight to show you how Jesus did that for the church in Philadelphia in the sixth letter of our series from the first chapters of Revelation.

Read v.7 – Philadelphia was a city established by Attalos the Second in honor of his brother, his king. So it is called the city of ??? (brotherly love). It wasn't a military city. It wasn't established for power, but simply to promote brotherly love. It's nickname in the second century B.C. was "gateway to the east." It was the door to

promote Greek culture, its art, science and government, to the east. Jesus uses that background to encourage them in the next verses.

Read v.7b-8a – There's the picture hanging in my bedroom while I was growing up, only this time the door is wide open. Jesus holds the keys and what he opens no one can shut, not you, not me, not the world, not our sins. He refers here to a verse in Isaiah 22:22 where a man by the name of Eliakim takes over the treasury for a man who was self-centered and wicked. This Eliakim becomes the new treasurer who holds the keys that allow him to distribute all the wealth of the kingdom of David. He is a picture or a type of Christ. Jesus is the one, who in chapter one is described as the one who holds the keys to death and Hades. He is the one who opens heaven. After his resurrection from the dead, Jesus told his disciples that he was giving them the keys to forgive the sins of the penitent and to warn those who are impenitent that the door to heaven is closed. Forgiveness, life, the promise of heaven, those are the treasures of God that are ours through Jesus and no one, no one can shut us out from them when Jesus is our Savior.

Read v.8b-10 – Apparently there were some in Philadelphia who were trying to close the door on the Christians there. They faced persecution, they faced false teachings, they faced a group of Jews who were denying Jesus as the Messiah and Savior of the world (that's most likely the reason Jesus describes himself in this letter as the one who is "holy and true" – true, literally means "genuine" – the one who is the real thing). Jesus also warns them that they will face even more difficulties in the future, yet he would keep them and protect them. Their "little strength" would preserve them.

What a neat thought – that on our own we have no strength, that we are dead in our transgressions and sins, that the door will always be shut and no matter what we do, no matter how hard we try, we will not be able to push it open again. But the One who rules the heavens and the earth, the One who set aside full use of his power and glory, the one who showed such little strength when he came as the child in Bethlehem placed in a manger, gives us all the strength we need – when doors close against us, when mountains fall into the heart of the sea, when we seem to be shut out, we can be still and know that He is God and His strength is all we need.

v.11-13 – And speaking of mountains shaking, the next verses use another picture the Philadelphians would have been familiar with. Philadelphia was in an area where earthquakes were common. In fact, in the first century the city was destroyed by an earthquake and had to be rebuilt. The only thing left standing were the pillars of the city temple – those pillars would have still been standing at the time they received this letter from Jesus. So think of the visual illustration – Jesus would keep them standing, keep the doors open to them and never again, would they have to worry about being left alone.

Finally, as he did in another letter, Jesus talks about the new names that he brings.

For us: that means we're no longer known as sinner but saint.

- no longer an enemy of God but a child of God.
- No longer one who is on the outside looking in but who has been ushered in through the door to life.

For the church: that means we're no longer known as the old Jerusalem but the new.

- no longer is the church wishing and longing for heaven, but has a home in heaven.
- No longer are we looking for a distance, but we already have a place beyond the pearly gates.

And for Christ: that means he too has a new name to share with us.

- No longer is he the little child of Bethlehem but the Prince of peace.
- No longer is he the suffering servant but now he is the conquering hero.
- No longer the one who is crucified, died and buried, but the one who holds the keys to the kingdom of God.

So next week we celebrate Christmas...

- and we hear about the shepherds who walked through the door of the stable. But let's remember who opened the door to their hearts.

- And we'll hear of the wisemen bring their gifts through the door of Jesus' humble house. But let's remember who used the star and the door of Scripture to bring them to know their Savior.
- Then we'll hear of Mary pondering all these things in her heart, but remember it's the Spirit who opened that door and let her know the joy of salvation.

And that means you better be careful, for the Lord isn't just knocking at the door, he's ready to through his shoulder against it this Christmas and again break down that door and come into your hearts and change things for you. Don't get in the way and Christmas will be the open door for you once again. Amen.

SDG

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