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Our Open Door

Revelation 3:7-13

Don't worry about the time. Just screw up your ears to listen fast. We can take care of that. It won't be a problem. I can preach fast if you can listen fast. But I won't read the Bible fast, because we want to really meditate on what the Lord says to us. As you know, of course, in the opening chapters of Revelation, the Lord is sending letters - Jesus is sending letters - to the churches through their guardian angels. And we come this morning to Revelation three at verse seven to the letter that the Lord Jesus sent to the church in Philadelphia.

⁷And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write: 'The words of the holy one, the true one, who has the key of David, who opens and no one will shut, who shuts and no one opens.

⁸'I know your works. Behold, I have set before you an open door, which no one is able to shut. I know that you have but little power, and yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name. ⁹Behold, I will make those of the synagogue of Satan who say that they are Jews and are not, but lie—behold I will make them come and bow down before your feet and they will learn that I have loved you. ¹⁰Because you have kept my word about patient endurance, I will keep you from the hour of trial that is coming on the whole world, to try those who dwell on the earth. ¹¹I am coming soon. Hold fast what you have, so that no one may seize your crown. ¹²The one who conquers, I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God. Never shall he go out of it, and 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 from my God out of heaven, and my own new name. ¹³He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.'

Obviously, as I am sure you have before, read these letters to the churches, this is the one [*in which*] the Lord most heartily and fully commends His people for their diligence and obedience unto Him and His service. We learn a great deal, though, about the process by which they became such - Philadelphia, "the city of brotherly love." Why so? Why ever would there be such a derivative from ancient days concerning brotherly love? You know, of course, there is no brotherly love apart from the love the Father has for His children in Jesus Christ. You know very well, don't you, that we're able to love Him, that is, God, and each other because He has first loved us in Jesus Christ. Clearly His love had been settled, and His grace had been given to this church at Philadelphia.

Of course we always tend to focus on the circumstances, and we see that among the circumstances would be this one, as the Lord says to this church, "I know you have but a very little bit of power. I know you have no clout in this world. I know that you're not recognized as being a great church, or a big church, or an influential church. I know that. You have but little power." Yet, something is going on here dynamically. Something is going on here, I think, that's intrinsic and basic to the life of any church. That would be a growing group of people as this morning, as Bill's testimony and Rene's prayer indicated - putting the Kingdom first - really putting

the Kingdom first, not just verbally with intellectual assent, but with one's life. And indeed, we see that as we move from one venue to another, God is calling us to do that as well.

The focus here is obviously on the sovereign Christ. From the top it reads, doesn't it, that He's the one that opens doors and nobody can shut them. Think of that. He opens doors that nobody can shut and He shuts doors that nobody can open. Opens doors no one can shut, shuts doors no one can open. He says to this little church, "Look, I've set before you an open door and no one - no one - is going to shut it. Not the devil, not you in your flesh, not anybody anywhere. This door is open for you and no one is going to shut it."

I want to ask you, please, to walk with me through this open door. I think it's very significant that we drove up to the church these last several times that I've been there, most recently with Pat yesterday. Driving up there there's a temporary door in place of those lovely doors that were there. And this thing was padlocked initially and I couldn't get in it. It's a pretty wretched door because it's a construction door. It's not the door that will be. It's not the pair of doors that we set there. They're off being worked on, and Lord willing they'll be put back there this week. We'll be able to see them as we go next Sunday in their refinished, refurbished condition. But I thought about those doors as a kind of emblem of this. Will this be a closed-door church or an open door-church? Will we see what we've heard this morning, that God has set before us an open door so that in the actual sense the doors of this church always swing outward? And in essence they're never closed. Just as has been true at DMMS as we met here.

What about this open door Jesus has opened for the church in Philadelphia which no one can shut? Four things, quickly, with you. This is a door of opportunity. It is a door of opportunity, but secondly we're going to see that it's a door of opposition. That's the reality of it. A door of opportunity becomes a door of opposition. But it is for this church, clearly, a door of obedience. It's a door of obedience. And lastly, and wonderfully, it's a door of overcoming. How about that? A door of opportunity, opposition, obedience and overcoming.

A door of opportunity - now just exactly how is that? Well, this church will respond with all the power it has, given of the Lord. It will respond to the great commission. This church will share the good news of the gospel of God who has opened the door to them. In other words, they will see the reason the door's opened is that you want people to come into the Kingdom of God. And that's the only reason. The door is opened as well for those of us who have come to worship God and who have been put there to go through those doors to the world to avail ourselves of every opportunity of sharing the good news of the gospel, and of bringing blessing to our neighbors in this area. We see that this is, then, the door of opportunity, a door of responding to the love of Christ not by loving each other but by loving our visitors, and there are going to be many of them. There are now, but there will be many more coming, praise God! To receive them in the love of the Lamb of God as they move through these open doors. Coming into this oasis where there are the waters of life and that's of course only in Jesus Christ.

Our response to our open door is going to be significant not only as individuals. Now clearly you do have to make an individual decision about this, and how *you* will

participate in the life and ministry of the congregation that is committed to an open-door policy. You have to decide about that. And I think that may be, in some cases, more painful than you realize. To do what Alan Tibbles did: to really put Jesus and the Kingdom first – to really do that. But how wonderful it is, when that happens. So that is before you as an individual or as individuals, but you know it's before us as a congregation.

Yesterday, as Pat and I went into the sanctuary and down through the rooms that will be used for Sunday School and for fellowship, through the kitchen, all these things – we're thinking about giving this physical place to God so that this will be a place where His people will pulsate, reverberate, and live in His grace. And where there will be the dynamic of His love all the time. This will be the church of the "Open Door." Why do I know that? Well, you know this very well, don't you? I have the Vision & Mission statements in my Bible and I read them often. Here's our vision – let me refresh your recollections. I quote:

By His grace and for His glory, we are committed continually to growing in our love for and relationship with Jesus Christ, and to being God's hands, feet, and voice in bringing persons to a saving relationship with Him among the diverse communities in the greater Winchester area and around the world.

Oh my, what a statement. Do we mean that? Is that truly our intent as a congregation? The aggregate of all of us individuals who must make this decision – we've made a decision as a congregation. Our leaders have presented to us a vision with nine ministry points, one of which is fulfilled next Sunday when we have our first service in the building. But this has been presented to us and we have not argued about it or over it. We've received this. We've committed ourselves to this. This is the open door. This is who we are. This is where we are, and this is what we're about.

But it is, just like in Philadelphia, the door of opposition - the door of opposition – so much in the way, so very much in the way. Winston Churchill was dead right, wasn't he, when in the early days of World War II, when the skies were black with Luftwaffe aircraft, when that tiny little island was about to be – the world thought – obliterated. Winston Churchill, in that gruff voice on the radio, spoke to his nation and he said, "We know, don't we, that there is no winning without warfare, that there is no victory without vigilance, that there is no opportunity without opposition." Surely Christians know that. Do you think the devil will roll over, that his henchmen will not attack us as we move to this new place, and fulfill the vision God has given us? Do you think that our flesh won't assail us? Oh my, do you think that our pomposity, our pride, our self-centeredness, our individualism won't assault us? You know that it will. The opposition not only from the world, but from our own flesh, and certainly, as he's available, the devil and all of his fallen henchmen. And we see, don't we, that this is a door of opposition. Temptations to disunity, temptation to heavy opinionation [*sic*], temptations to make this church in our own image rather than as God has commanded us in Scripture. The whole deal in planning for worship and ministry – there will be a stumbling block if we're not committed to the will of God and the power of the Spirit. Why, it's happened to many churches, where their greatest blessing has become their greatest cursing, because they haven't really seen through all of these physical things, that the whole reason for them is the glory of God and the service of Christ, in our case, in

Winchester and around the world. So, we know there will be opposition from without and it may come, incredibly, from within, because we tempt ourselves, very often, in our weakness before God.

We think... or I think... I imagine you do as well, of Solomon. Did anyone have a greater start than David's son, King Solomon? I can't think of anybody in the history of the world that had such a great start. And when we go to Scripture, and we read, for example, from II Chronicles 1 or from I Kings 3, we see that Solomon loved the Lord with a great passion, that he really did love God, that he was humble as he came before God. He said, "I'm but a little child." He was a grown man, but he meant, of course, he was inexperienced, that he was in great need, and he presented himself to God on that ground, saying, "I can't do this without you. I know very well that I can't." And so the Lord said to Solomon, who loved Him, the Lord said, "Well, what do you want? What would you ask me for?" Maybe you're thinking, "Well, Solomon became so rich, he must have asked God for a lot of dough! Since he became so powerful, he must have asked God for many soldiers and troops and a great kingdom." No. No. No. No, he didn't. Solomon only asked God for wisdom and understanding, that he might lead the people of Israel as God would have it. God's response is notable, "Solomon, I'm going to give you what you ask for. The people need a wise leader and you're him. I'm going to give you wisdom and understanding. But, Solomon, because you have not asked me for wealth, for power, even for long life, because you have not asked me for any of those things I'm going to give them all to you in great abundance." What a blessing! What a blessing! What a start! What a catapult to glory!

But, Paul Harvey would ask us, "What is the rest of the story?" Well, the rest of the story is found, at least in part, in Ecclesiastes chapter two. I want to quote Solomon, himself, now mature in years, now having led Israel all these years. Here's the testimony of Solomon in Ecclesiastes 2:9-11:

⁹So I became great and surpassed all who were before me in Jerusalem. Also my wisdom remained with me. ¹⁰And whatever my eyes desired I did not keep from them. I kept my heart from no pleasure, for my heart found pleasure in all my toil, and this was my reward for all my toil. ¹¹Then I considered all that my hands had done and the toil I had expended in doing it, and behold, all was vanity and a striving after wind, and there was nothing to be gained under the sun.

"I blew it! I made a mess of it! Along the way, I lost my way." Now, why was that? The pride of the flesh, the self-centeredness of a strong man, the individualism that consumes.

Then, of course, there was more opposition in Philadelphia because there was this synagogue of Satan and they're defined here. And we encounter them also in a previous letter to Smyrna - the church in Smyrna - they were an assembly of people who were ostensibly Jewish, but the Scripture says not really, because they rejected the Messiah. They were still waiting around for another Messiah. There is no other Messiah. Jesus has come and they were furious with the apostles, and they were furious with the servants of Christ in these churches, and they're formidable adversaries - very, very powerful adversaries. In II Corinthians 4:4 we have this commentary on such men, "...the god of this world," I think we know who that is, "...the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers..." How do you

blind the mind? I thought that you blinded eyes. Listen to this, this is what the Greek reads, "...the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God."

The synagogue of Satan is very, very much like many groups... many religious groups in our day. How would I define them? They are blind men and women who would impose their blindness on you and me and everybody else - blind men and women who would impose their blindness on others. The door of opportunity will always be a door of opposition. Nothing worthwhile for Christ will be done by Eagle Heights without the opposition of the world, the flesh, and the devil.

But thirdly we said this door is a door of obedience. That church, that small church in Philadelphia, was astonishingly obedient. Jesus says to them, "I know you have only a little power, but," He says, "you've kept my word. You have not denied my name. You've endured patiently. You have been obedient." Will we be... are we obedient to Christ in the heavenly vision? The way you combat the opposition is obedience to Christ, love for Christ, delight in Christ, joy for Christ, and engagement in the ministry to which He has clearly called us. "You've kept my word." We said together, didn't we, that PCA statement of faith. "We believe the Word to be in the original autographs (manuscripts), infallible, inerrant, in everything." We believe that. "You've kept my Word." The ground for their life and their ministry was Scripture. Well, this is our statement of faith. This is our statement of faith worked out of the pulpit nominating committee and by the session and diaconate handed down to us. We engaged with it, didn't we, and correspondingly said, "Yes, yes, yes." We're guided by the Word of God.

"You've not denied my Name." We know that many did then and many do now. It's a... it's a sad thing. It's a hard thing. The young man named Julian said he received Jesus Christ, and this was in the early 300s AD, and he said he received Christ and subsequently he was... he was made emperor in Rome - the most powerful man in the world. Julian renounced his faith, and you read about him in the history books, his title is "Julian the Apostate." How horrible. He denied the name of Jesus and as Julian did that, it's very interesting, he was apparently a person who was very honest, he said, "Christians bear the name of their Lord. I don't want to bear that name anymore." So he would call himself something else, he called himself religious as he tried to restore the pantheon of Roman gods in Rome. But do you remember, it was Julian the Apostate who said publicly to his fellow pagans, "I've never seen anything like the mercy ministries of these Christians, how they take care of not only their own poor, but the pagan poor as well. I've never seen anything like this." He said, "It's a disgrace to us pagans, that these Christians out-live us and out-love us and out-give us, in care of those poor." Hm... But he denied the name of Jesus. We bear His name with great delight and delight in Him, do we not? "You've kept my word, you've not denied my name." Then, "You've endured patiently." Is patience a mark of your life? Is it a mark of our life as a congregation - waiting on the Lord in the sense that He's sovereign, we know He's working, we understand He's gracious, and we wait on Him? And we endure patiently, as we labor for Him. We trust Him with all the results. Ours is the plowing and the sowing of the seed and, when He commands us, a reaping of the harvest. But His is the glory, and His is the honor, and His is the joy for His people - for His people. "You've endured patiently."

A cobbler, a shoemaker, and a shoe repair guy, who was British, was called of God to be a missionary, and you know his name very well, his name was William Carey. He was called to the vast nation of India. And it was an impossible task. He had no funds. He had nothing. But God had called him, and the call was so potent that he knew that under any condition he must go. But he knew that he must have those around him who would pray for him. And I just love the way Carey said this to his friends as they gathered, his believing friends, his Christian friends, as they gathered. He said, "You know I have to go. You understand, of course, because you know and love me. You understand that God has called me to go to India. You know my inadequacy. You know that I can't do this in myself, in my flesh." Carey said, "I would like to ask now for you to enter into this venture with me." And here's how Carey put it to them - he said, "I shall go if you'll hold the rope. I shall go if you'll hold the rope."

When Rene was praying for the missionaries I was wondering, "How tightly are you holding the ropes for them?" How often do you pray for them? Are you giving more and more to the ministry of Eagle Heights, because these missionaries have such a large chunk of our budget, as they should? But are you holding the rope? Are you holding the rope? Do you hold the rope for your dear brothers and sisters in this church when they're in trouble? Do you hold the rope? Do you hold the rope? Are you a good rope-holder? Or do you hold only your own rope? I love this, "I shall go if you will hold the rope." And you know, don't you, that the most powerful rope is prayer. The most powerful rope is the rope of prayer. This is the door of obedience. And what obedience means is that we hold the rope diligently. We don't forget to pray, and to enter into the lives of others as they serve the Lord, any more than we'd forget our own service to Him and the world.

The door of opportunity, the door of opposition, the door of obedience, and finally and wonderfully the door of overcoming. The reason I don't take long in this is that I really can't comprehend most of this. I have been a Christian for so many years, and a pastor for so many years - I can only give you a little bit of this. Listen to it, "The one who conquers, I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God." I understand something of that, that God will take your loving service and your diligence and your patience in Him, and He will make you strong forever. Now the people of Philadelphia had a special understanding of this because they had so many earthquakes. They had so many earthquakes that the ones among them who believed always cried out for good structure and stability. "To be made a pillar in the house of my God," said Jesus, means, among other things, certainly that you'll be the most stable person your friends know. Are you? Do you know what I've noticed about folks when they really get in trouble? They don't go to shallow people. They don't go to crumbling folks. They go to the strongest person they can find. They go generally to the person they consider to be closest to God of all their friends. That's what it means to be a pillar. That's exactly what it means... well, I know that. Thank you, Lord. I know that much. Oh, but we have to go on.

I think I understand, too, the business of being kept from much of the final horror - not meaning, of course, that we are ourselves somehow spared the difficulties and crunches that come before Jesus returns, because churches around the world, they haven't been spared that. I was "praying through" with Pat this week [regarding] the church in Kyrgyzstan. The church in some particular places in Iran and Iraq and other places - the churches in Saudi Arabia where there is horrendous persecution.

They haven't been spared, but they're strong for Christ. We read their quotes and we weep as we pray for them. What strength, what towering strength in Christ is theirs. Sometimes I contrast that with the flaccid and flabby character in my own life and the life of the American church. But, we understand that, don't we? God will not keep us from it physically, but He'll keep us in it, will keep us from the devastation of it, because we are His. I understand that. But can you imagine what this means, "...to receive the name of my God?" Jesus is speaking now, "I will write on this conqueror, this one who's faithful, I'll write on him the name of my God." What does that mean!? "...the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which comes down from my God out of heaven, and," - get this - "I'll write on him, her, my own new name."

Now you may read some commentaries, and there may be some commentators who say they know what that means. If they write that to you then you know they'll fib about other things, too. They don't have any more clue than I do about this. We can only guess, but it's OK to guess. It's alright to contemplate the wonder of this! Having written upon our very being the new name that Jesus receives in glory. Well, I don't exactly know what it is, but I do know it's wonderful beyond words, wonderful beyond measure. So this door of opportunity, opposition, obedience becomes a door of victory for us. This is the door of overcoming. This is the way to be a pillar in the House of God, to be in the temple of God forever and ever. This is the way of humble service, loving service, gentle perseverance, staying in there with the grace of God through everything. We have this open door, don't we? Hold fast to what you have, and that, of course, is Christ, "...so that no one may seize your crown." Whatever could that mean? One commentator wrote, *[and] more have [as well],* "Well, that means your salvation." Of course it doesn't. Of course it doesn't mean your salvation. Nobody can take away your salvation. What does it mean? What does the crown mean? It means the same thing that the letter to the Ephesian church, Revelation 2:5, the same thing the lampstand connotes. The lampstand is not the salvation of the church or the salvation of the members. The lampstand is their witness. Listen, listen, listen! Hundreds of churches in America have lost their lampstand. Multitudes of Christians in America, professing Christians, have lost their crowns, that is, their testimony, their testimony, and not their salvation. If they know Jesus they're saved forever. They'll be in heaven. But think about what's involved in losing your testimony, in being so wanton wasteful of God's gifts that you lose your testimony. And that's possible. And when you lose your testimony, we see in this, and other passages, what God does. He sets you aside; He puts you on the shelf, and uses someone else. Of course He does, because Scripture says that the gospel will be preached in all the nations of the world in all of the tongues, and then the end will come. Then Jesus will come back. Oh my goodness, we know every single person called of God will come. But will you miss the joy that God has afforded you of leading one or more of them to Him? It's your witness, it's your testimony.

We close with the one who conquers. We can't conquer in ourselves, can we? No way we can win the victory in our own strength, is there? No. So what then is meant by one who conquers? And how is it that He conquers? Still in Revelation over in chapter fourteen, Revelation fourteen, two verses, two verses, the twelfth, and the thirteenth. *"¹²Here is a call for the endurance of the saints, those who keep the commandments of God and their faith in Jesus."* Are you ready now? "Here's a call for the endurance of the saints, those who keep the commandments of God and

their faith in Jesus." What happened? Well, "¹³*And I heard a voice from heaven saying, 'Write this: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.' 'Blessed indeed,' says the Spirit, 'that they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow them!'*" Their testimony, their labors in the Gospel, their service in mercy for the North End in Winchester and wherever. "...they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow them." As Pat and I read this in our devotions recently, she had a tremendous comment. She said, "Is it possible that a part of those wonderful, flowing white garments we have in glory is the Lord simply clothing us with His works that we have done in obedience to Him?" Praise God! Pray with me about these things.

Yes, Lord, we see it. We see it. We know very well it's there, You set before us at Eagle Heights a door of opportunity. You did it long ago, sixteen years ago, You did it. You've reaffirmed it across these years, our Father. As the church has met in schools under good pastors and their leadership, Lord, You have reaffirmed it in recent days as we've responded to Your new call. And now, Father, You do it with a new physical place to meet. But we know the essence is Your glory, Your love, Your mercy, Your power, Your strength. Father we know that we've been called to go through this door of opportunity, to face the opposition that is inevitably out there and in here. We look forward, Lord also, to see that this is a door of obedience, the door of obedience for us, and that victory is given [to] us as Paul writes about it, he says, "We are more than conquerors through Him who loved us." Thank you, most of all, for the One who loves us, even Jesus Christ, we pray in His name, amen.