

# THE CHURCH OF THE OPEN DOOR

Revelation 3:7-13

Notes for preachers

Intro.

Since there are so many quotes in this story, I would probably read it word for word.

Dr. Paul Brand, a well-known missionary doctor and author, was raised in India. His parents were missionaries there. In his book, "In His Image," he writes about his mother. It is one of the most touching stories you'll ever read. He writes that when his mother was 75 years old, she was still walking miles every day, visiting the villages in the southern part of India, teaching the people about Jesus.

One day, at age 75, she was traveling alone and fell and broke her hip. After two days of just lying there in pain, some workers found her and put her on a makeshift cot and loaded her into their jeep and drove 150 miles over deep rutted roads to find a doctor who could set the broken bones. But the very bumpy ride damaged her bones so badly that her hip never completely healed.

Dr. Brand said, "I visited my mother in her mud-covered hut several weeks after all of this happened. I watched as she took two bamboo crutches that she had made herself and moved from one place to another with her feet just dragging behind because she had lost all feeling in them."

He said, "At age 75, with a broken hip, unable to stand on her own two legs, I thought that I made a pretty intelligent suggestion. I suggested that she retire." He said, "She turned around and looked at me and said, 'What value is that? If I try to preserve this body just a few more years and it is not being used for God, of what value is that?'"

So, she continued working. She kept on riding her donkey to villages until she was 93 years old. At age 93, she couldn't stay on her donkey anymore. She kept falling off. But she didn't stop preaching. Indian men would carry her in hammocks from one village to another. She persisted in telling people about Jesus Christ until she died at age 95.

Paul Brand writes, "My most vivid memory of my mother is of her propped up against a stone wall as people are coming to her from their homes, schools, and places of work. I can still see the wrinkles in her face, and her skin so tanned by the weather and the heat. I saw her speaking to those people. I looked at them and saw the sparkle in their eyes, and the smiles on their faces. And I saw them deeply moved by the message of God's love, spoken by this old woman. I knew what they saw was not an old woman who had passed her prime, but a beautiful person bringing tidings of love straight from heaven."

How do you react to this story? When I first read this account, it made me smile as I pictured this 93-year-old woman far past her prime still enthusiastically telling others about Jesus. Furthermore, I found it convicting as I thought, if she could do this at her age with all her medical issues what could keep anyone of us from having that kind of impact on our neighbors and friends right now?

In Revelation 3 John describes the church at Philadelphia as having “little strength.” In addition, he notes that he knows they were being persecuted because they kept talking about Jesus in a hostile environment. Yet, despite all the reasons they could have offered for why they could not witness as boldly as others, they offered no excuses. On the contrary, like Paul Brand’s mom, they were surprisingly outspoken in their ongoing witness to Jesus. They had every reason to be afraid to speak out for Jesus, but they were bold in their witness.

How did they do it? More importantly, how can we do it?

The subject of this message is “why shouldn’t we be afraid to witness about Jesus?” This another subject completed message or key word message. The key word is “reasons.” There are three “reasons” why we shouldn’t be afraid to witness. 1. Because Christ gives us authority. 2. Because Christ gives us opportunity. 3. Because Christ gives us security.



**Use pictures from film**

Open your device or turn in your Bibles to Revelation 3:7-13 as we read the incredible story of this amazing church.

*“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. 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. 9 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. 10 Since you have kept my command to endure patiently, I will also keep you from the hour of trial that is going to come on the whole world to test the inhabitants of the earth.*

*11 I am coming soon. Hold on to what you have, so that no one will take your crown. 12 The one who is victorious I will make a pillar in the temple of my God. Never again will they leave it. I will write on them 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 them my new name. 13 Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches.*

## **I. We Should Not Be Afraid To Witness Because Christ Gives Us The Authority-He Turns The Key V. 7**

*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.*

### **A. How do we know Christ has the authority?**

Like Athens, Philadelphia was granted the honor of the title “neokronos” which means “temple keeper.” In the early Roman Empire, the title began to be used for entire cities, who thus were “neokoroi” of their patron deities, such as Ephesus with Artemis. This use was rare, however, and the “neokorate” is mostly associated with the Roman imperial cult. The Greek cities of the East were awarded the title of “neokoros” by the Roman Senate, with the consent of the emperor, in token of their having built an imperial cult temple recognized as of province-wide significance. As a highly prestigious title, cities vied for it, and the wealthier cities sought and received the title multiple times, for temples dedicated to different emperors.

The motivation for emperor worship in Philadelphia stems from a particularly devastating earthquake that struck the area in 17 A.D., destroying the city of Sardis and doing extensive damage to Philadelphia. To help the city recover from this disaster, Emperor Tiberius remitted the tribute owed to Rome for a period of five years. In gratitude, Philadelphia took the name Neocaesarea and dedicated a temple to Tiberius. The title they gave to the emperor was “The Son of the Holy One.” It is undoubtedly for this reason the Lord is called, “He who is holy and is true” in verse 7.

The prophet Isaiah is the one who popularized the phrase the “holy one of Israel.” He uses that name 27 times in his book. The root word for “holy” has the connotation of being set apart or separate. In Isaiah, Yahweh is set apart from all the other gods. Isaiah 45:5, 6 expresses the sentiment of this word as the prophet declares,

*I am the Lord, and there is no other;  
apart from me there is no God.  
I will strengthen you,  
though you have not acknowledged me,  
6 so that from the rising of the sun  
to the place of its setting  
people may know there is none besides me.  
I am the Lord, and there is no other.*

So, while the other citizens of Philadelphia worshiped Caesar by declaring that he is the “son of the holy one,” the brave recipients of this book maintained their conviction that Yahweh is the only true God. That is reenforced further by the next word: “true.” There are two words for “true” in the Greek New Testament. The first word identifies what is true as opposed to what is false. The second word points to what is genuine and

real as opposed to what is fake and shadowy. It is the second word that appears here. This is a very important distinction. In America today, Christians are told we need to be tolerant. We must accept that there are many ways to god. All ways are equally good. But the Bible is quite clear on this point. There is one true, genuine God and all other gods are fake. That is not politically correct, but any careful reading of the Bible should bring any reader to the point where they see the God of the Bible insists, *I am the Lord, and there is no other!*

### ***B. How does the Christian get the “key” to Christ’s authority?***

After advising the Philadelphian church that he is holy and true, Jesus proclaims that he holds the key to the house of David. This is likely an allusion to the story recorded in Isaiah 22:15-25. There we learn that Shebna was a cheap politician who held what amounted to the office of prime minister in Hezekiah’s day. Because of his pride, he was ejected from his office and replaced by Eliakim the son of Hilkiyah as recorded in the Book of Isaiah. As Eliakim is established in his new role we read,

*In that day I will summon my servant, Eliakim son of Hilkiyah. 21 I will clothe him with your robe and fasten your sash around him and hand your authority over to him. He will be a father to those who live in Jerusalem and to the people of Judah. 22 I will place on his shoulder **the key to the house of David; what he opens no one can shut, and what he shuts no one can open.***

The obvious implication of this is that since Jesus has the “key,” he can open or shut whatever he wishes. Thus, opportunities for us to share about our faith in Jesus are not up to us. We need to pray for occasions to witness and then be prepared for Jesus to open the doors for us. What other conclusion can we draw when we read this.

#### **Consider telling this story in your words.**

Helen Roseveare, a missionary medical doctor to Zaïre (Congo) tells a story that powerfully illustrates that Jesus holds the key to the house of David.

Helen briefly left her medical post to transport another missionary on emergency leave to Uganda. She made the 300-mile drive in one day and was exhausted when she arrived late that night. Before daybreak the next morning, she began the long trip home and was enjoying the flat, well-paved road, which was a luxury not known in Zaïre. But as she sped along the empty highway, she began to nod and knew she must stop to stretch and drink some coffee.

There was no sign of life - no villages for miles around - as she pulled off the road near a bush. But then, out of nowhere, an African man appeared. He was the last person she wanted to see at that hour and at that place. She could not ignore him however, and she knew it was her duty to go through the usual African greetings. With that accomplished, he stood silently until she asked him what he wanted.

"Are you a ‘sent one’?" he asked. She was taken back. Of course, she was, that is what a missionary is, but she asked him what he meant. "Are you a ‘sent one’ by a great God to tell me about something called Jesus?"

Here she was out in the middle of nowhere, and an illiterate herdsman had appeared from behind a bush and asked if she was a “sent one?” She spoke in Swahili and explained in simple words about Jesus, and he accepted Jesus as his Savior!

Wow! Can witnessing be that easy? When we understand what it means to believe that Jesus holds the key, it can be! As a young Christian, I did street evangelism with Teen Challenge. Usually, I joined fellow believers in Detroit, and we went out to some of the roughest neighborhoods in the city. We went to bars, pool halls or wherever we found men standing around. The question we asked was “what do you think about the person of Jesus Christ?” What I have learned about street evangelism over the years is that when I go to poorer communities, it is never hard to get people to talk to me. One time, however, in a wealthy community a homeowner said, “I have a new Mercedes in my garage, I have a yacht on Lake Michigan, what do need from Jesus?”

So, going to the bars and pool halls was quite energizing for me. I was on a mission! I was determined to see men come to Christ and my approach showed that. Once my partner grabbed me and pulled me out of a pool hall where I was in a discussion. When we got outside, he said, “George, you are making evangelism too hard! You need to slow down and remember you can’t lead anyone to Jesus. That is the work of the Holy Spirit. Relax allow the Spirit to do what you can never do!”

Ouch! I know I needed that. What’s more, trying to do my part in fulfilling the Great Commission is so much easier when I realize that Jesus holds the key that makes any effort so much easier.

#### Transition statement

As we move on to the second main portion of this message, we learn that because he has the key, Jesus is the one who opens doors for us to witness.

## II. We Should Not Be Afraid To Witness Because Christ Gives Us The Opportunity—He Opens The Door Vv 8-11

*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. 9 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. 10 Since you have kept **my** command to endure patiently, I will also keep you from the hour of trial that is going to come on the whole world to test the inhabitants of the earth. 11 I am coming soon. Hold on to what you have, so that no one will take your crown.*

Philadelphia was founded for a special purpose and with a special intention. It was situated where the borders of Mysia, Lydia and Phrygia met. In addition, a main trade route from Sardis passed through Philadelphia. Since it was on the threshold of the highlands, it had a position of great importance for it was quite literally the door between the cities of Phrygia, the Aegean and the coastal towns of Ephesus, Smyrna, and Pergamum.

It was founded with the deliberate intention that it might be an ambassador of Greek culture and the Greek language to Lydia and Phrygia. It did its work so well that by A.D. 19 the Lydians had forgotten their own Lydian language and were all but Greeks. It was the Chicago O'Hare of Asia Minor. People came into Philadelphia from all over the world. Then they left carrying with them memories of their experiences in this transformational city. Thus, many of those who came to Christ in this city would carry the good news of the Gospel throughout the known world.

That is what the Risen Christ means when he speaks of the "open door" that is set before Philadelphia. Three centuries before, Philadelphia had been given an open door to spread Greek ideas in the lands beyond. Now because of its unique location, there was a great missionary opportunity, an "open door" to carry to men who never knew it the message of the love of Jesus Christ.

## ***A. How Christ provides us opportunity to witness?***

### **1. He puts an open door before us.**

The pronouns throughout the message to this church reinforces Jesus' central message. Ten times in these verses Jesus uses the pronoun "I" to emphasize that the work of evangelism is his. In addition, eight times he uses the pronoun "my" to magnify the same point!

It has been hard for me to fully grasp this message that Jesus is the one who opens doors for me. As a seminary student, I came to Christ at the funeral service for my roommate Dieter Wolski. It was at that service that I prayed "whatever Dieter had I now know I don't have so give me the faith that he had." After that prayer I was transformed. I was also on fire. God almost immediately gave me the opportunity to share my faith in very public ways. I spoke in front our student body at Concordia. I spoke in churches. As a PhD student at the University of Iowa I had the opportunity to address the sophomore medical class each year on the subject of death and dying. Also, at my secular university a Christian campus group called the Navigators asked me to speak several times a year to students on themes that would be of interest to curious university students who were not followers of Jesus. Even university leaders employed by the school who were not necessarily Christ followers scheduled me to speak at various smaller colleges in Iowa. My assigned topic was "An Evangelical Perspective on Life and Ethic." We saw hundreds of students come to Christ through those "open doors."

That was all fantastic. When we moved to Colorado, I assumed I would continue in my role as an evangelist to large groups. I let many know about what I had done in Iowa. To my shock, I found no one seemed to care. Undaunted I kept banging on doors, but none opened. I knew the Great Commission demands that we are all to be witnesses. I eventually concluded there must be something I was missing. Can you guess what I was missing? I assumed that the way God would use me was exactly the way he used me in the past. Then I came across the passage in **2 Samuel 5:18-25**. In those verses we learn that twice David was in the same valley (Rephaim). Twice they faced the same Philistine enemy. Twice he asks God how he should attack the enemy. The first time



God said, “attack them straight on!” David did what God said and was wonderfully successful. Later he is in the same valley facing the same enemy. What would you have done? Why would David need to do anything differently than last time? He wouldn’t! God was the one who would give him victory so why did anything need to change? But as we read the text we see this second time, God instructs David.

*Do not go straight up, but circle around behind them and attack them in front of the poplar trees. 24 As soon as you hear the sound of marching in the tops of the poplar trees, move quickly, because that will mean the Lord has gone out in front of you to strike the Philistine army.*

Why did the method need to change. God could have given victory any way he wished. I can think of only one reason for the change. God wanted to make sure that David kept asking God what to do and relied on him to open the doors for victory.

That is what I was missing. I assumed that God would always open the door the same way. If he did, I might have written a book on how to be an effective witness for Christ by speaking in front of large groups. People might have read my book and asked me to talk about my success. When that happens, we are forgetting the pronouns in this passage! 18 times we are reminded open doors are about what God does. It is never about us. Once I realized that, I asked God how he wanted to use me in Colorado. God reminded me that I was meeting with several couples and some singles who wanted help with their marriage. All the singles were not Christ followers. Of the husbands and wives that came to see me, at least one of them was not a Christian. What did God prompt me to do? He showed me the obvious open door he created for evangelism. My wife and I started an evangelistic Bible study group that to this day is one of the most fulfilling things I have done in my Christian life.

My advice then is, don’t bang on doors hoping they will open. Ask God to give you an open door and he will!

### ***B. What we must do to gain opportunity to witness. The door opens because:***

As he reminds these believers he will open the door, Jesus also acknowledges in v. 8 that he knows they have just a little power. By this statement he is advising us that this was probably a small congregation with little wealth or influence. Nonetheless, they had an open door for evangelism!

**You may want to substitute your own story here. If not, tell this story in the 3<sup>rd</sup> person. Report as a researcher what you learned about the work of Mission India.**

A number of years ago my wife and I went to India with Mission India. Among the ministries of Mission India was a school of evangelism. I went to be a speaker in their school. My students were mostly young people who had no more than a 6<sup>th</sup> grade education. They also were very poor and had no political or socioeconomic influence. In other words, they were much like these believers at Philadelphia! And not a lot different than you! Except you probably have more education and influence.

During my time teaching I learned that my class of 269 in the last three months had contacted 59,693 homes. The setup at the school was that students would go to class for three months. The next three months they went out to communities all over India and

planted churches. My class in the last three months saw 7,536 decisions for Christ. 990 were enfolded into the church through baptism. 6,253 new believers gathered in 999 new churches in previously totally unreached people groups.

How did they do it? Their method was “prayer evangelism.” As they went to a new community, they learned about the people. They found out their names, the names of their children. They learned about their new friends’ hopes and desires. They also learned about the legitimate prayer requests of their new neighbors. Then when the time was right, they asked, “would you mind if I pray for your sick son now?” Or “do you mind if I pray about your employment problem?” Finally, they prayed expecting that the one who opens door would show these unbelievers “signs” that “all might believe that Jesus was the promised Messiah, the Savior of sinners, and the Son of God; that, by this faith, they might obtain eternal life.” John 20:30, 31.

You know the results! In three months, 7,536 souls were added to the kingdom! Would that method work with your neighbors? Jay Pathak & Dave Runyon in their book *The Art of Neighboring* answer with a resounding, “yes!” This is the method that 1000’s of churches across America are successfully using to fulfil the part of the Great Commandment that says, “we should love our neighbors as ourselves.”

As we continue with the details of the passage, we see that his church at Philadelphus was also facing persecution from the “Synagogue of Satan.” We know little about this synagogue except that it is mentioned in the passage. Archeology offers no insight about the details of this body. No one doubts its existence, but we can only guess they persecuted these believers by appealing to their political and sociological pressure to get the Roman government to censure, punish and maybe even kill these Christians if they refuse to say Tiberius Caesar is “the son of the Holy One.”

We know the drill; a government that insists on tolerance will persecute Christians when we say Jesus is the way the truth and the light. The practical problem is the government is using its authority to demand that we become polytheists even though they will never admit that out loud. Thus, many of us feel we must keep our head low, and our mouths shut because our government and media say we should. These believers who had only a little strength did not cave into the pressures from the government or the synagogue of Satan. I hope that motivates you to stand strong too!

Repeat your subject here as you move on to the 3<sup>rd</sup> reason, we should not be afraid to witness. The subject of this message is “why shouldn’t we be afraid to witness about Jesus?” There are three “reasons” why we shouldn’t be afraid to witness. 1. Because Christ gives us authority. 2. Because Christ gives us opportunity. 3. Because Christ gives us security.

### **III. We Should Not Be Afraid To Witness Because Christ Gives Us Security—He Makes Us A “Pillar” And Gives Us A “New Name” Vv 12, 13**

*12 The one who is victorious I will make a pillar in the temple of my God. Never again will they leave it. I will write on them 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 them my new name. 13 Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches.*

### **A. What does it mean to say he will make us a “pillar”?**

Philadelphia, which means “brotherly love,” was situated in Lydia along the Hermus River valley about 38 miles southeast of Sardis. It was backed by volcanic cliffs and though the land was rich and fertile from the volcanic residue, Philadelphia was a dangerous place to live due to the many earthquakes experienced in the region. Because of its location, the city was in constant danger of earthquakes and experienced shocks as an everyday occurrence according to Strabo. As a result, many of its inhabitants chose to live in huts outside the city in the open country. Notice the allusion to this in the promise of 3:12, “and he will not go out from it anymore.” As we already observed, the city of Philadelphia suffered from a particularly devastating earthquake that struck the area in A.D. 17 destroying the city of Sardis and doing extensive damage to Philadelphia.

As you look at the size of the pillars, you can imagine the strength of these earthquakes.



So, in this city where even these huge pillars would crumble and fall Jesus says, *The one who is victorious I will make a pillar in the temple of my God. Never again will they leave it.* Doesn't that encourage you?

### **B. What does it mean to say he will give us a “new name”?**

Additionally, he says I will give the overcomer a new name! What does that mean? The city had had two other names in the previous hundred years. For a few years it was called Neocaesarea in honor of Emperor Tiberius who rebuilt the city after the earthquake of AD 17. After that it was called “Flavia” in honor of “Flavius,” the family name of Emperor Vespasian who was equally kind to them.

So, what is the name God will give to the overcomer? The prophet Ezekiel answers that question in Ezekiel 48:35 where describing the events of the end of the age writes, “And the name of the city from that time on will be: the Lord is there.”

Conc.

## David & Svea Flood

Since this is a long illustration and it is a story, I would share it without reading the details. Picture the facts of the story and say what you see. Don't worry if you leave out a detail from the script. If you didn't remember it after reading the story several times, your audience likely wouldn't remember it too.



*Aggie: A Girl Without a Country* written by Aggie Hurst was published just after her death in 1981.

Back in 1921, a couple named David and Svea Flood went with their two-year-old son from Sweden to the heart of Africa now called the Congo with another couple, the Eriksons. The village of N'dolera was in a remote area. When they arrived, the chief would not let them enter his town for fear of alienating the local gods. The two couples built their own huts a half a mile outside the village.

The only contact with the villagers was a young boy, who sold them, chickens and eggs twice a week. Svea was a tiny woman only four feet, eight inches tall and she decided if this boy was the only African she could talk to, she would try to lead the boy to Jesus. And in fact, she succeeded.

In time the Eriksons decided they had had enough suffering and left, leaving David & Svea to remain near N'dolera and go alone. Then of all things, Svea found herself pregnant. When the time came for her to give birth, the village chief softened enough to allow a midwife to help her. A little girl was born, Aggie. The delivery, however, was exhausting, and Svea was already weak from bouts of malaria. She lasted only another seventeen days. With her death, something inside David snapped. He dug a crude grave, buried his twenty-seven-year-old wife, and gave his newborn daughter to the Eriksons. He snarled, "I'm going back to Sweden. I've lost my wife, and I obviously can't take care of this baby. God has ruined my life." He not only rejected his calling but God Himself.

A few months later the Eriksons both died, and Aggie was given to American workers and brought to the United States. Aggie grew up in Minnesota and attended North Central Bible College in Minneapolis, MN. There she met and married Dewey Hurst.

Years passed. Her husband became president of a Christian college in Seattle, WA. One day a Swedish religious magazine appeared in her mailbox. She had no idea who had sent it, and, of course, she couldn't read the words. Suddenly, a photo stopped her cold. There in a primitive setting was a grave with a white cross and on the cross

were the words SVEA FLOOD. Aggie jumped into her car and went straight to a college faculty member who could translate the article. "What does it say?" She demanded! The instructor summarized the story:

It was about workers who had come to N'dolera long ago...the birth of a white baby...the death of a young mother...the one little African boy who had been led to Christ...and how, after the whites had all left, the boy had grown up and finally persuaded the chief to let him build a school in the village. He had won all his students to Christ...the children led their parents to Christ...even the chief had become a Christian. Today, there were six hundred believers in that one village. All because of the sacrifice of David and Svea Flood. For the Hursts' twenty-fifth wedding anniversary, the college gave them a vacation to Sweden.

There Aggie sought to find her real father. An old man now, David Flood had remarried, had four more children, and ruined his life with alcohol. He had recently suffered a stroke. Still bitter, he had one rule, "Never mention the name of God, because God took everything from me." Aggie was not deterred. She walked into the squalid apartment and approached the seventy-three-year-old man lying in a rumped, messy bed. "Papa", he turned and began to cry. "Aggie, I never meant to give you away." "It's all right Papa, God took care of me." The man instantly stiffened. "God forgot all of us. Our lives have been like this because of Him." He turned his face to the wall. "Papa, I've got a little story to tell you, and it's a true one. You didn't go to Africa in vain. Mama didn't die in vain. The little boy you led to the Lord grew up to win that whole village to Jesus Christ. Today there are six hundred African people serving the Lord because you were faithful to the call of God in your life...Papa, Jesus loves you. He never hated you." By the end of the afternoon, Aggie's father came back to the God he had resented for so many years. A few weeks later David Flood died and went to heaven.

A few years later, the Hursts were attending a conference in London, England. A report was given by the superintendent of the national church of Congo. He spoke of 110,000 baptized believers in his nation. Aggie asked him afterward if he had ever heard of David and Svea Flood. "Yes, madam, it was Svea Flood who led me to Jesus Christ. I was the boy who brought food to your parents before you were born. To this day, your mother's grave and her memory are honored by all of us." He embraced her in a long, sobbing hug. "You must come to Africa to see, because your mother is the most famous person in our history."

Years later Aggie and her husband did visit her mother's grave with the white cross.

Having heard this story, do you doubt that no matter how weak or insignificant you are that God can use you despite persecution or any other obstacle that Satan can throw at you? Jesus is the open door. He holds the key! He is waiting to open the door for you. Will you ask? The name he wants to give you is "the Lord is There." That means the Lord is with you! Claim your new name then and be prepared to see what God chooses to do for you and with you as you proclaim his name to your family member, friends, and neighbors!