

SEVEN LETTERS to SEVEN CHURCHES



SMALL GROUP NOTES: Sunday 9th Aug – Week 6 ‘PHILADELPHIA’

Read Revelation 3.7-13

Locked Out

Have you ever been locked out of your house? What did it feel like?

Have you ever been “locked out” of certain relationships or groups? What did that feel like?

Read Revelation 3.7-13

Holy, True, holding the key of David

There is not a lot that we know about the church in Philadelphia. It is likely that this church was founded when Paul spent extensive time ministering in the city of Ephesus in Asia Minor (see Acts 19). The city was founded in 189 B.C., making it the youngest of the seven cities mentioned in Revelation 2 and 3. It was intended to be a centre of Greek culture and language, situated at a crossroads of many important trade routes. The city’s name derives from the close relationship between King Eumenes of Pergamum and his brother, Attalus II, whose nickname was Philadelphus (literally, “brother lover”).

This letter begins with a description of Jesus in 3:7.

What do you think is significant to this local church about Jesus’ description of Himself here?

In his sermon, Tim focused on phrase ‘keys of David’ – originally from Isaiah 22.22.

What can you remember about the significance of this?

Some background if you need it - Shebna, who was the steward of the king of Judah has been relieved of his duty and Eliakim, the new appointment is being given authority to carry out his role. This position of steward, was one who served the king: who dispensed the king’s wealth, who allowed entrance to the king’s presence, and who displayed the king’s power. The steward was often second in power to the king, much like a prime minister.

And the Key of David was a symbol of authority to do all this – to act on behalf of the king, to access all areas and be the gatekeeper to the very house of David – the king and his kingdom, and for all those in the royal lineage who take on the role of king in the future.

Isaiah 22 says of the role given to Eliakim ‘I will place on his shoulder the keys to the house of David, and what he shuts no one can open.’

What can we learn about the role and authority of Jesus in his carrying of the key of David? How is this significant to us today?

In the Bible the kingdom of David was so much more than just a description of a time in history when David and his line ruled – it was a phrase that captured a powerful idea that the line of David was not dead and from it, one would arise in the future as Messiah to come and establish the new Kingdom of God, would come and put things right – Jesus is that one – the son of David - and as the Messiah he holds the keys, the office, the authority of God the Father to establish his kingdom and rule at his right hand.

The Open Door

Verses 8-10 are words of strong encouragement from Jesus to this church. In fact, this is one of two letters with lots of encouraging words and no correcting words (see also the letter to Smyrna in 2:8-11).

What do you see as the clearest words of encouragement for this church?

In one sense, Philadelphia was a missionary city for Greek culture. Because of this, there seems to be a missionary impulse in Christ’s words for Philadelphia. When Jesus says “I have placed before you and open door” and “I know that you have a little power?”, **what might that mean in relation to all this?**

What words of encouragement and mission would you hope Jesus would speak to our church or, more personally, to you?

Jesus says that the one who overcomes – or is victorious – will be made “a pillar in the temple of my God” (3:12a). A pillar conveys both stability and endurance. Christ also promises to write a threefold name upon them (3:12b). Philadelphia had a history of difficult earthquakes that shook it, sometimes to destruction.

What would these promises mean to the church there?

Think a little more around the idea of doors opening.

Can you think of a time in your life when you know Jesus opened a door for you and it led to fresh possibilities?

How do you know he was opening a door – and it wasn’t just a coincidence or the result of your own making/ability?

What help does this give to those who are waiting/longing for doors to be opened?

Sometimes the doors that are opened are surprising or unexpected or even unwanted.
Can you relate to this?

Have you had the courage to step through doors even though you had misgivings and now looking back can see how God has been able to work because you were willing to take that step?

How is God speaking to you through your study of this letter to the church in Philadelphia?

How might you take it into action this week?