

Eastertide Letter #6

Letter to Philadelphia

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Question:

What do you have?

What do WE have as a group? A place to meet, AC, liturgy, a band, community, kids, rhythms, language, traditions

In the book of Acts, the story of the early church, Peter and John had to the temple to pray and they meet a beggar who can't walk and Peter says to "Silver and gold I don't have." Peter knows what he has! It's important to know what we have but many times in our interactions, we think we have things and Peter says he doesn't have things.

Today, Rev 3:7-13 is about a church called Philadelphia:

Rev 3: 7-13

7 "To the angel of the church in Philadelphia write:

We have discussed angels and most likely this refers to the messenger or the bishop (pastor) or the person receiving the text from Jesus through John. But what about church? Sometimes we think of it as a space where we meet (I'm going to church: this equals a space). Some of you would say the church is not a building but is the people. But I think it's actually both a place and the people.

The early church took the word Ekklesia, Greek for "assembly," and referred to a group of mostly men, who made decisions. There was a pastor who organized and stuck to the agenda and under him were elders who helped keep things going. But the whole assembly would vote and make decisions on the agenda. The early church assembly thought of themselves as the people, the elected people, who made spiritual decisions, laws, and well being in that particular city. So this greeting is to this group of people.

Geography: On the next page is a map that gives us a larger picture of these churches. Notice New Jerusalem. You can see all the churches and Philadelphia, the city of brotherly love, named for a king whose brother loved him. You can read more about this. It was named, therefore, after the love of two men, two brothers.

Some things to know about Philadelphia:



Philadelphia also was destroyed by the same earthquake that we learned about last week in Sardis. Philadelphia got the same tax break and was rebuilt, just like Sardis, and they renamed themselves “Neo-Cesaria.”

For a long time after this earthquake, there were many tremors which made the people afraid of being in the city and dying. They actually

made their temple foundations float so they wouldn't crumble. Because they had to rebuild so much, they put names of donors or gods on pillars and structures. They had a god of wine for their grapes grown on the ashes outside of the city; Philadelphia was sometimes known as the “drunk city.” Early on, it was built by the Greeks as a missionary city to bring Greek culture. Later, historians called it “Little Athens.” This is helpful as you think about what is written to this city.

These are the words of him who is holy and true, who holds the key of David.

No one is holy except God (Isa 6:3...) this first statement is attached to his **truth**: “True” in the Bible doesn’t translate well. It really means “**real and reality**.” I am the one who is holy, REAL, who is reality...or “I am.” **I am** all that is!

The “key to David” is from Isa 22 which is a story about the “key master” of the temple and the treasury. This person typically had access to everything, reminiscent of janitors in more recent days who were the only ones who had the keys to everything. In this passage, the key master was taking advantage of his access to benefit himself and Isaiah gives a prophetic word about this:

Isaiah 22:20-22

20 “Then it will come about in that day,
That I will summon My servant Eliakim the son of Hilkiah,
21 And I will clothe him with your tunic
And tie your sash securely about him.
I will entrust him with your authority,
And he will become a father to the inhabitants of Jerusalem and to the
house of Judah.
22 “Then I will set the key of the house of David on his shoulder,

When he opens no one will shut, When he shuts no one will open.

(Rev 3: 7) What he opens no one can shut, and what he shuts no one can open.

The first image of doors is an idea we use a lot: We might say, “the door was opened and I got the job.” Col 4:3 says to pray the door to the gospel will be opened. We pray God will open these doors because we **cannot** open them; only God can open them. The other idea is that the reality of Jesus opens the door to the treasury to you: You now have access to everything that Jesus has access to. He has swung it open and no one can close it.

As we process the question, “What do you have?” I think it is linked to what doors are opened and shut to you.

Let’s look at the word KEPT which means “to attend to carefully, take care of, to guard.” When you take a child to a zoo or the trampoline park for the first time, their brains are excited and full of endorphins (Jessica says that children’s brains are always on an acid trip; this is why they cannot recall actual events as they happen); major explosions happen in the child’s brain and the parent must be keep their attention focused on their child, making sure they are OK. This is what Jesus did to this church:

8 I know your deeds.

Many of the letters compliment and then correct the church. However, there is no correction here.

See,

This is saying “See!” Jesus is surprised and excited, maybe giddy, about them!

I have placed before you an open door that no one can shut. I know that you have little strength,

You don’t have a lot of influence.

yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name.

This church is little. He doesn’t say they are ALIVE (like last week). Do you feel little, like you don’t matter much? Does this resonate with you? I like this letter because I feel little and I feel like it speaks to me. But Jesus says that even though they are little, they have kept my word: they have guarded, attended to, and surrounded themselves with His Word. They have not gotten rid of Jesus’s NAME. They ponder what God has to say and identify as his followers. They own his name. When I hear this, I think to myself, “I can do this, regardless of the impact I have in this

world.” I can choose to be attentive and sober-minded and make this choice! Jesus has opened the door and even though you don’t have a lot of impact, you have done what I asked you to do. These people did what He asked and made him the central part of their lives.

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.

It’s clear that if people don’t follow Jesus, then they aren’t really Jews. They have denied the Messiah and are persecuting his (small) church. However, the door **that cannot be shut** is because these believers **will have influence over them**.

The early church memorized and lived out the Sermon on the Mount. One principle of this was turning the other cheek: in front of people who are persecuting you, you love them and attempt to make peace. They practiced this: this open door that is open is because that they will bring in their enemies (brotherly love). This door that is open and cannot be shut: your enemies, those who persecute you, are the ones you are to love and have voice with and impact with. This is to turn the other cheek. Paul was the example of this: he once persecuted the church and then became an apostle. You are invited to walk into these harsh places and love and care for these people and turn the other cheek. These people will change: This the story of the gospel. You have the power to reach those who are persecuting you. It could be a whole bunch of people. There are details, of course, but it’s important to know this door is open.

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.

Because you have guarded, been careful and focused, Jesus will do the same thing for them. This is not **transactional**: writing about intimacy is difficult; it may seem to be transactional but it’s not. He’s saying that they have kept his word, they are intimate, and he will also keep them and guard them and attend to them in the hour of testing and trial.

Recently, people have interpreted this as the beginning of end of the world and the tribulation. I would say even though this might be true, this is a letter to a specific church. He is saying that in the midst of the trauma, he will be attentive to you and keep you. This is important because when you are feeling persecuted, it feels like the end of the world. The invitation and promise is to stand and endure patiently because Jesus will endure with you and keep you.

I am coming soon. Hold on to what you have, so that no one will take your crown.



Tug of War: Remember this from school? I like this because you can coordinate things and let go and then laugh at the other

side. But These guys are getting calluses and torn skin because they aren't letting go. This kind of HOLD means He is coming soon: His spirit is coming to blow over Philadelphia, and even though they are little in size and influence, they are not to let anyone take their crown. They are the elected body there and Jesus will keep them. He could say this to the Village!

And here is what he will do for them:

12 The one who is victorious I will make a pillar in the temple of my God. Never again will they leave it.

Never will they run out from it

When the city is trembling, everyone is leaving (from fear of an earthquake), you will be sturdy, like a pillar that cannot be shaken. He is saying that he will be in them: he's got them.

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.

Just like the names on the pillars, his name is on me. He will add the name of the city and the new name as well. He is saying, "They are in Christ" and they can hold on, they are his pillar and part of his city. **There is deep intimacy.** In ancient times, writing names on something made it very important.

13 Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

This is like the other letters' endings. This is summed up with the experience with John and Peter: "I don't have any money but **what I do have, I will give you.**" **What do you have? Are you willing to put this phrase at the end?** This is what the open door is: in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, WALK. What we have is this authority of Jesus! When you ask this question, this is what we have. It comes with an intimacy with Jesus. If you want to stay connected to this authority and act on this, they should endure patiently and love their oppressors. This is the way of the gospel and how our enemies become our friends.

What do you have? What doors are open and what doors has Jesus closed?

Mark: We sang this song this morning:

*Come quickly sovereign Lord,
give us words that bring life to the weary;
Wake us up in the morning and teach us to listen
To those who insult us and beat us, you laid your life down
Help us to surrender and draw back
Where is our accuser? Who can face us?*

The sovereign Lord will protect us.”

We don't have to protect ourselves: He gives us words of life. The accuser cannot stand against us.