

Date: 9.5.21
 Text: Revelation 3:7-13
 Title: #thedoorisopen!
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Some of you will know the story of John Paton who was one of the first missionaries to the people of Vanuatu. He arrived on the island of Tanna on November 5, 1858 and 3 months later his pregnant wife Mary gave birth to their son. For weeks Mary suffered from terrible bouts of fever and pneumonia and diarrhea and delirium. And then suddenly and tragically, she died. And a month later, their baby boy died as well.

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Paton was now alone on an island of cannibals, overcome by grief himself, while battling 14 separate incidents of fever himself, coming close to death more than once. He dug the two graves with his own hands and later wrote, *"Stunned by that dreadful loss in entering upon this field of labor to which the Lord had Himself so evidently led me; my reason seemed for a time almost to give way...During all the following months & years when I labored on for the salvation of the savage islands amidst difficulties, dangers, and deaths, **but for Jesus ... I must have gone mad and died beside that lonely grave.**"*

Paton stayed four years until he was forced to leave. And yet, Paton refused to count his years at Tanna a failure. He stayed in Vanuatu, relocated this time to a neighbouring island, the Island of Aniwa, where in short order, the entire island came to faith in Jesus Christ. "I claimed Aniwa for Jesus and by the grace of God, Aniwa now worships at the Saviour's feet."

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For Paton the closing of one door meant the opening of another. There were obstacles everywhere but also opportunities that God presented to him. And that is also the picture we get in our sixth Church, the Church of Philadelphia. It was the youngest, and the smallest of all the seven Churches addressed in Revelation but a Church where the door was open.

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1. Opportunities (verses 7-8)

"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 & what he shuts no one can open. ⁸I know your deeds. See, I have placed before you an open door that no one can shut."

Jesus is the one who is speaking and Jesus is the one who holds the key of David. The keys to the kingdom. The Kingdom of God. And because he holds the keys, the only keys to the kingdom he alone can let people in. He can open that door to whoever he wants to open it for. And he can shut it to whoever he wants to shut it for. And he has opened the door for this small and struggling Church. Yes, they are doing it tough but there is Jesus standing at that door, making sure that his own people get to enjoy all that God has prepared for them.

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But the open door is not just the door of salvation for the people of the Church. It is also an open door for ministry from this Church. Throughout the New Testament, the expression "an open door" is often used for missionary opportunities. 1 Corinthians 16:9, Paul remarks that he would stay on at Ephesus until Pentecost because *"a great door for effective work"* had been opened for him. In 2 Corinthians 2:12 he writes, *"When I went to Troas to preach*

the Gospel of Christ, a door was opened for me in the Lord." In Colossians 4:3 he calls on the church to pray that "God may open a door for our message so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ." Christ had opened not only the door to the kingdom of God for those at Philadelphia, but he had opened the way for the spread of the kingdom of God from the believers at Philadelphia to the world. Yet the Jews were trying to slam that door shut!

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2. Opportunities but also **Obstacles (verses 8b-9)**

"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. ⁹I 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."

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So there were two obstacles in particular. The first was that the Church at Philadelphia was weak. It has little strength. It didn't have the riches of its neighbour Laodicea. Nor the history and heritage of Ephesus. It was small, insignificant, poor and overlooked. And yet up against it was the might of the Jews and behind the persecution of the Jews was Satan himself. It wasn't just people that was opposing this church with little strength. It was the spiritual forces of the devil they were up against. So the obstacles before them were huge!

Now when the Philadelphians looked at the "little strength" that they had, they concentrated on the word "little." Outwardly there was no much going for them. But Christ wanted them to emphasise the word "strength" because these were the words of the one who is holy and true. The one who holds the keys to the kingdom. The one who had opened the door to heaven for them and was opening the door for them to reach others as well.

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As Chuck Swindoll has said, "*the Church in Philadelphia had a little power with a great potential, not because of their size, resources or influence but because of the holiness, faithfulness and sovereign authority of their Lord*". And I think that is something we need to keep remembering as a Church. We are not big in terms of numbers. We don't have a great building. Or huge resources.

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And sometimes we let our fears overcome us, what will people say if they find out that I am a Christian? Or our doubts, I have to know all the answers to other people's questions before I share my faith. Or we know that our society is turning against us so why not take the path of least resistance, I will believe in Jesus myself but I will not take the opportunities that God gives me with others just in case they turn against me and give me a hard time.

But friends just think of the opportunities we have here at Sunday @ 6. Look at the door that has opened for us in our work places, at the university amongst our young people. All who have been in this Church for a while have had some great teaching. Many of you have peers that are encouraging you in the faith. We have some great models for you to follow. And NCS and the internship and Vanuatu can open your eyes to a world of possibilities.

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3. Opportunities, Obstacles and thirdly **Jesus' offer (verses 9-13)**

⁹I 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." Jesus says, I will take on those who are opposing you. The synagogue

might be slamming their doors shut but in the end they are the ones who will not enter the door of salvation. And what's more Jesus will keep the Christians of Philadelphia safe.

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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." Notice Jesus doesn't say I will stop the hour of trial. Nor does he promise that they will avoid the hour of trial. He pledges to keep them safe in the midst of the hour of trial.

Jesus might supernaturally protect them like he did with Israel from the plagues in Egypt in the time of Moses. Or he might remove them like he did with Lot as they escaped Sodom. Or he might be with them as he did with Shadrach, Meshack and Abednego where one like the Son of God walked with them in the fiery furnace. No matter what the world or the devil throws at them, God's people will be safe, strong and secure with their Saviour.

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And lastly, Jesus will honour them. 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."

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The Philadelphians Christians will not just be another brick in the wall, not just living stones being built into a spiritual temple, they will be a pillar of the temple. One that helps hold others up. One that is special, significant. Do you know in the OT temple there was only two pillars in the whole temple? And here are the Christians of this weak, small Church in this wonderful place of honour.

But it is not like the stained glass window at the back of the church or the plaques in older Church in memory and honour of the person themselves. On that pillar is not the name of the Christian, but the name of God. These Christians are declaring God's name, God's character. God's strength. Little strength, yes, but their littleness is point to God's strength.

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You know sometimes I just feel so small and so insignificant. Sometimes I wonder what have I got to show for 40 years of being a Christian, 25 years of being in ministry. Sometimes I say to myself, I just can't do what God is asking me to do. I am no good at that. I am no good at evangelism. I am no good at hospitality. I am no good at conflict. No good at leading.

And so I have to remember, as you also need to remember, here at Philadelphia is a church with little strength. But with an open door. An open door to heaven opened for us by no other than Jesus himself. And an open door for ministry with others. An open door to witness to the people of Newcastle & maybe to witness to the people of the world. And yes I do have little strength. But I make up the little part and Jesus makes up the strength part.

So will I concentrate on the little? That will get me nowhere unless I take that littleness to Jesus. And then I can focus on his strength. His offer. And the opportunities he has put before me. And remembering that it only through him that I can now overcome. To him who overcomes, they will get to sit with Jesus on his throne. Wow. How amazing will that be?