

“The Little Church That Should”

Text: Revelation 3:7-13

[The communicator may want to read some lines from “*The Little Engine That Could.*” I found the story really connects with children and parents. It was interesting when I went to the Public Library there must have been 20 or so listings of the book and every one had been checked out. Just a thought]

When we hear the word Philadelphia we immediately think of the historic city in Pennsylvania. It conjures up historic acts such as the American Revolution. My wife and I saw the cherished “Liberty Bell.” Its name is known by many as the “city of brotherly love” although there are cynics who say it is more like “brotherly shove.” I think it was my seminary professor that said he saw graffiti on a wall in Philadelphia that read. “Humpty Dumpy was shoved.” Actually it was named after the ancient city in Turkey. The ancient city was rebuilt after a disastrous earthquake. Tiberius Caesar subsidized much of the project and the people in gratitude named it New Caesar. Later King Attalus named it Philadelphia in honor of his brother Eumenes. The name means “lover of a brother.”

Jesus wrote this letter to the pastor of the church in Philadelphia. I would like to read the letter to you. As you listen to the words of Jesus ask yourself, “How might this apply to our church?”

First you need to know that Jesus had great admiration for the church in Philadelphia. Only two of the seven churches delivered by the postman were exempt from the word “repent.” They received no reprimand from the Head of the church. Perhaps Jesus understood the stress they had endured. They didn’t need added criticism.

Jesus offered the congregation a **GOLDEN OPPORTUNITY**, V.8 After the disastrous earthquake in A.D. 17 Tiberius Caesar was motivated to restore the city because of its strategic location. It was the gateway to the Great Plateau. One of the finest Roman highways was built to take travelers to the Lydia. In 200 BC the mandate was to take Greek culture into that region of uncultured uneducated barbaric people. So the Director of the Church challenged them to tag on to that cultural commission by taking the pure wisdom of God revealed in the person and work of Jesus to the pagans, i.e. “The Great Commission.”

Second, this opportunity was not based on their **HUMAN RESOURCES.**

Jesus diagnosed them as frail, of little strength. V.8 Perhaps that was one of the reasons that the sovereign Savior chose them for such a task. The word “know” is not in the Greek text and so the idea may have been. “Because you have little strength” it will be more glorious for you to walk through his “open door.” Questions that may be asked are;

Was it the smallness of the congregation?

Was it the lack of trained workers?

Was it the age of the membership?

Was it the fear of failure?

Was it insufficient funding?

These were often the excuses I encountered when undertaking an opportunity. We don’t really know exactly what constituted their “little strength.” But we do know the limitations were inconsequential to the plan and power of God. We have been schooled by the stories of David verses Goliath; Gideon and the three hundred; the loaves and fish in the hands of Jesus. So then what did this little church have that attracted the Head of the church?

There were two qualities which Jesus **REWARDED**:

1. They were living by the **WORDS OF JESUS**.

We sing about it in the old song “Trust and Obey.”

Here the communicator can support the bold and true the words of Jesus to us. His every promised presence and available power.

2. They were totally loyal to the name of Jesus. There is strength in the name of Jesus. The communicator should research that many who labor in the name of Christianity have not succeeded because they labor for an institution, a tradition, and even causes that avoid lifting up the name of Jesus. Two years ago I attended the graduation ceremony of the University of San Francisco. Even though the school is rooted in the strictest teaching of the Jesuit’s they would not close the benediction with the words, “In the name of Jesus we pray.” I am sure that your research will find many who do not express loyalty to His precious name.

Now we come to the resources for the opportunity. They are symbolized by a Key, v.7 and an **Open Door**, v.8

Isaiah saw the key to Jerusalem, symbolizing control of Jerusalem.

Read Isaiah 22:20-24. In the days of King Hezekiah there was a political leader named Shebna (a person of authority who was in

charge of the palace. He was caught in a personal scam for his own benefit. It upset God, "I will take him and whirl him around (like a discus thrower and hurl him into a far country." He would be replaced by a godly man named Eliakim of whom God said, "I will place in his hand the key to the house of David. What he opens, no one can shut, and what he shuts, no one can open." **JESUS HOLDS THE KEY TO OPORTUNITY AND VICTORY.** Jesus has the key to the Kingdom of heaven, to the presence of the Father, to eternal life, to the storehouse of truth, to death and hell and to the "open door."

So to the little church in Philadelphia Jesus says I will open the doors of ministry and service. I am told that a Christian testimony still exists in the city. We also have seen closed doors of opportunity open in the last 30 years in Poland, East Germany, and Hungary.

As you listen to Jesus today has he spoken to you of new frontiers of service and ministry? Are you aware of a door of opportunity that may not be open long, but is wide open now? Have you been evaluating an open door based on your little strength or the mighty power of the Creator God? In my preparation of this message I turned to a very small book by Vance Havner entitled "Repent or Else." He discussed the seven churches which received letters from Jesus. In his chapter on the church in Philadelphia he gave a personal testimony regarding "the Lord of the Open Door would open doors that no man can shut." He wrote, "I would like to bear witness that I have proved this Philadelphian promise of the open door through years of ministry and it never failed. Promotion comes not from the south, east or west, but from God; and if we commit our way unto Him and trust Him, He will bring it to pass. No man or group of men hold the keys to Christian service. The Lord of the vineyard is still in charge and His eyes run to and fro throughout the whole earth to shew Himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward Him." After fifty plus years of ministry I can add my witness to Vance Havner's claim. I have been told if you leave this group of churches you will never be able to speak in them again. Not long after that remark I was called to a small struggling church in San Francisco and within tree years it was evident that it was an open door experience that Jesus had opened for me. More that 600 attended each Lord's Day. Later I was told by a seminary professor, "I would really like for you to teach at our seminary, but you don't have the right union card." But in God's providence I was allowed to serve over eight years in that fine seminary.

I know that Jesus and I agreed on my “little strength” state, but He continued to swing the doors open so that I could joyfully serve in his name. I like very much the saying of Alexander Whyte, “Don’t let anyone take the crown intended for you.”