

The Church of the Open Door

by Ronald Glass

Revival is a sovereign work of God that He controls how, when, and why it comes, and it is a divine opportunity for churches to experience a time of refreshing and blessing.

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Scripture: Revelation 3:7

Topics: "Revival"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses the concept of revival in the church. They argue that revival is not something that can be achieved through a formula or prescription, but rather it is a sovereign work of God. The speaker emphasizes that Jesus is the one who revives his church and that revival is symbolized as an open door. They also highlight the importance of remaining faithful to Christ and the obligations that come with experiencing revival. The speaker warns against the trend of trying to force revival through various programs and approaches, emphasizing the need for reliance on God's power.

Transcript

Well, from the Lord Jesus Christ, who died on the cross of Calvary, as we've just been singing, we want to turn our attention to the Lord Jesus Christ, the Sovereign Lord of His Church. And for that, I want you to turn with me today, please, to the third chapter of Revelation. Revelation, chapter 3, and we're going to begin today in verse 7. Revelation, chapter 3, verses 7 through 13.

Follow as I read, please. And to the angel, or the messenger, of the church in Philadelphia, write, He who is holy, who is true, who has the key of David, who opens and no one will shut, and who shuts and no one opens, says this, I know your deeds. Behold, I have put before you an open door which no one can shut.

Because you have a little power and have kept my word and have not denied my name, behold, I will cause those of the synagogue of Satan who say that they are Jews and are not, but lie, I will make them come and bow down at your feet and make them know that I have loved you. Because you have kept the word of my perseverance, I also will keep you from the hour of testing, that hour which is about to come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth. I am coming quickly.

Hold fast what you have, so that no one will take your crown. He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God, and he will not go out from it anymore, and I will write on him the name of my God and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem which comes down out of heaven from my God,

and my new name. He who has an ear, let him hear what the spirit says to the churches.

This first decade of the 21st century has been the decade of the megachurch. As the seeker-sensitive church growth movement, which started roughly back in the 1970s, has grown and multiplied. It has borne the fruit of large, self-proclaimed evangelical congregations, and many small churches have been left wondering whether the Lord cares about them.

If there is a revival going on in America, obviously it must not have anything to do with them. They struggle week by week, and they are not building huge buildings with packed parking lots and big musical productions and all of that. Thus, in the minds of many of us today, I think blessing has come to be equated with bigness.

Spiritual vitality is indicated by size. That has become an obsession in many churches today. But today, I want to disagree with this kind of thinking.

I think the history of revivals with which the Lord has blessed his church throughout this age proves something quite different. God has often awakened small congregations, and sometimes while he left the larger churches untouched by the awakening. You go back in history, and you read of many awakenings in rural areas with very small churches of basically farmers, where sometimes the city churches were more or less left untouched.

But I think even more, the Bible itself proves that size is no indicator of spirituality. You don't have to be a megachurch to be loved by God or to be revived. Now, we are concluding our series on biblical revival by moving to the New Testament, in fact, to two of the letters to the seven churches which form the opening part of the book of the Revelation.

Together these two letters addressed to these churches contain a powerful message to Christian congregations throughout the church age. In fact, all seven of these letters are a powerful lesson to the churches who are doing their ministry in those days just prior to the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. Here in Revelation, we see that as the church is addressed in chapters 2 and 3, the church then raptured and worshipping in heaven in chapters 4 and 5, and then from chapter 6 to chapter 19, the period that we call the Tribulation Period.

Now, when it comes to revival, I think the final two letters are particularly relevant. Clearly, what we see in these churches already in the first century, mind you, towards the end of the first century, the church has only been in existence for about 60 years or so, and already we are seeing indications that the church needs revival. That's how fast sometimes spiritual apathy can set in.

Today, I want to turn to the sixth of these seven letters, and the first of the ones we are going to be looking at, and that is the church to the church at Philadelphia. Let me just say a word first about the town of Philadelphia. It was located in West Central Asia Minor, and as you know, Asia Minor is what today we call Turkey.

In West Central Asia Minor, it was northeast of the major city of Ephesus, which was on the coast. A highway ran through the city, connecting the city to Smyrna, and Smyrna is a place where there was a church that received another one of these seven letters. Smyrna was 100 miles to the west.

Now, the main Roman imperial post road, that was the road that was used for transportation, particularly for the mails and for commercial purposes, that post road to the far east passed through the city of

Philadelphia. When we look at this city and the ancient historians, they tell us that the city was well known for its vineyards. Actually, it had the same kind of soil, essentially, that we have here on Long Island.

It was sort of a light sandy soil and was excellent for growing grapes, and it was therefore known for its vineyards and its grape industry. It also had a thriving textile and leather industry, and together, all of this made the city, at the time this letter was written, a fairly prosperous place. The city was named for King Attalus II, who reigned from 159 to 138 BC.

This man, this king, was known for having a very affectionate relationship with his brother. They were good friends. They loved each other as brothers, and so he became known as Attalus Philadelphus, that is, Attalus the Brother Lover, and this city was named after him.

It was a city of Greek culture, a center of Greek culture, later on sort of called the Athens of Asia Minor, but it was also a city that was prone to earthquakes, and there was a major one in AD 17, which destroyed the city. Tiberius Caesar, who was reigning in Rome at that time, rebuilt the city, and so in honor of him, they renamed the city Neocesarea, or the New Caesar. Eventually, the city was renamed again.

It was called Flavia, but it also retained its original name, Philadelphia, and that's the name to which it is addressed, the letter is addressed here in Revelation chapter 3. Now, there was a church in Philadelphia, and the Lord Jesus had a message for it. This is only one of the two of the letters, let me say that again, this is one of only two letters of the seven, for which there is no rebuke for this church. It is only a commendation and an encouragement.

Its message is highly relevant, I believe, to our study of revival. I've mentioned already that following the Second Great Awakening here in America, which took place roughly between the years 1800 and 1830, that revival gave way to revivalism, and there is a difference. Revivalists were really the forerunners of our 20th century evangelists, our mass evangelists, our traveling, our itinerant evangelists.

Revivalists believed that they didn't have to wait for the Lord to open the door of revival, they could force it open themselves. They believed this even with regard to the human heart, that they didn't have to wait for God to open a human heart, but rather by just pulling the right strings, pushing the right buttons, in other words, saying the right things and pleading persuasively enough they could extract decisions from people. Well, their approach to revival was the same thing.

Revival to them came down to a prescription. All you had to do was do this, this, this, and this, there was a formula, and then you would have revival. Our Lord's message to, as he calls it in these letters, the angel of the church, the messenger of the church, and many of us believe this is probably to the pastor of the church, the leading elder of the church.

Our Lord's message to the pastor of the Church of Philadelphia indicates something quite different. The Lord Jesus is the one who revives his church, and that revival is pictured here as an open door. And when he does, it means four things.

And I want to, just by way of review as well as by way of encouragement today, show you what the Lord Jesus had to say to a church, which I trust is not a whole lot different than Wading River Baptist Church. All right, let's look at it. First of all, revival means divine opportunities.

There in verses 7 and 8 we see this. To the angel of the church in Philadelphia write, He who is holy, who is true, who has the key of David, who opens and no one will shut, and who shuts and no one opens, say

this, I know your deeds. Behold, I have put before you an open door which no one can shut because you have a little power and have kept my word and have not denied my name.

Now let's look at verses 7 and 8. We are reminded here initially, and I think this is very vital, it is a review, but it's something we dare not forget. Revival is a sovereign work of God. It is something that God does.

The Lord Jesus Christ is in control of His church. He is Lord of His church. He is building His church.

And therefore, notice three things here. The Lord Jesus controls how revival comes. The Lord of the church here is distinguished with two attributes.

He who is holy and who is true. He is holy. He is righteous.

He is innocent. He is sinless. And He is true.

And the word true here means genuine or dependable. Jesus Himself, as you remember, in the upper room said to His disciples, I am the way, the truth and the life. He is the true Son of God, truly the Messiah of Israel, truly the Savior of mankind.

There is no other. He who is holy, He who is true. Now I believe that He announces Himself in this way because the Lord is reminding the church of this important truth.

A church that is going to be revived is a church that is seeking to be holy. And it is a church that cherishes the truth and genuinely seeks to believe it and to live it. It is a church that honors the one who Himself is holy and is true.

In other words, revival comes to Christ-centered churches who are absolutely committed to the truth of the Word of God and are committed to seeking to live holy and righteous lives. Churches that have no interest in those things are not candidates for revival. Now it is not going to be a perfect church.

There is no such thing as a perfect church. You and I know that. We are all imperfect sinners.

A church is a body of believers. We are redeemed. We are saved.

We are in the process of being sanctified, but we are not perfect yet. And as a result of that, a church is not perfect. But it is to be a church that is striving to honor the Lord Jesus in everything.

We are going to pray, Lord, revive us. Revive us again if we are going to sing that great hymn. Lord, breathe on us the breath of life.

Come sweeping through us with revival. If that is going to be our passion, then we need to be a church that is in a position to be revived. And that is being a Christ-centered church, a church that focuses on holiness of life and truth of Scripture.

The Lord Jesus controls how revival comes. He gives it to churches that are reflecting His character. Secondly, the Lord Jesus controls when revival comes.

And we see Him here as the Messiah speaking, He who has the key of David. That is an interesting phrase. What does He mean by this? Well, let me bring you back, if I may, to the book of Isaiah for a moment, because this is what the Lord Jesus in this letter, remember this is the Lord Jesus Himself speaking in this letter to Philadelphia.

He is making a reference to a passage in Isaiah chapter 22. I am not going to read this whole passage, but I do want to give you just an overview of what goes on in Isaiah 22, the latter part of the chapter. Hezekiah is the king and he has a man named Shebna who was his palace administrator.

He is the guy that had the key to the palace. He probably pretty much ran the palace staff, the janitors and the kitchen crew and all of the people that it took to run the palace. He was the one who did that.

That is why he had the key, he hung it around his neck so that he could open or close whatever doors he chose. However, if you read Isaiah 22, you find out that this guy Shebna decided that he was a little bit more important than just a guy with the key to the door, and so he went and built himself a fancy tomb, which was a way of saying, look at me, I am important. He was demoted by no less than God Himself, if you read Isaiah 22, beginning verse 15 and following.

But here is the verse that our Lord Jesus refers to. In verse 22, then says God, 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. Now this is referring to a coming day, verse 20. It will come about in that day.

Now he is referring to the new guy that they brought on, replaced Shebna with a guy named Eliakim, and he took over. But Eliakim here becomes a type of the coming Messiah, and it is the Messiah who has the key of David. Now here is what I think is being said.

The Lord Jesus Himself here is saying, I as the Messiah, who has the key of David, who can open and close the doors, I also have the key to the doors of my house. My churches. Now the Lord Jesus is going to open the door to his kingdom, the kingdom that is coming, his literal earthly kingdom someday.

But right now as he rules in, or he supervises his churches, the Lord Jesus has the keys. He can open the doors whenever he wishes. He can close them whenever he decides.

And every revival is a divine opportunity. It is an open door. But this is, I think, pretty important to understand as well.

If you look at the history of revivals, you understand that those doors are not open indefinitely. The Lord opens the door and gives a time of refreshing, a time of blessing to his church. And then the day comes when the Lord closes the door again.

And so the Lord Jesus controls how revival comes. He controls when revival comes. And thirdly, verse 8, he controls why revival comes.

Notice how he says it. I know your deeds. This was a prepared church.

I know your deeds. Now in some of the other letters, he goes on to rebuke them for some of their deeds. But here in Philadelphia, the Lord Jesus has no complaint with the church of Philadelphia.

I know your deeds. And that's all he says. He doesn't tell us what those deeds were.

But he says, because of your deeds, I have set before you an open door. This was a prepared church. This was apparently a church that was active, that was ministering, that was faithful.

They were doing the job that the Lord Jesus expected them to do. They were standing firm for the truth. You look at the letter to the Ephesians in chapter 2. But apparently, unlike that church in Ephesus, they were also attending to their first love.

They hadn't left their first love. And so they were a faithful church. Now apparently, the Jews in Philadelphia, and there was a large community of Jews in Philadelphia, that went back quite a number of years before.

In this area of Asia Minor, in fact, the great Antiochus Epiphanes, who's described in Daniel chapter 11, had decided to move a bunch of Jews into this area. And there were 2,000 families of Jews that were moved into this general area. They came from Babylonia, and they came from Mesopotamia.

And the reason that he did, that Antiochus brought the Jews into this area, was that the Phrygians, the people who lived there, native to that area, were pretty wild. And the Jews, he saw, were pretty tame. Well, they were pretty nice, pretty settled people.

And so he wanted to sort of civilize the wild Phrygians. So he brought a bunch of Jews to live into this area. And so the Jews had a synagogue there.

But the Jews, at this point, are hostile to the Christian church. And apparently, they had attempted to force the Jewish Christians to deny the Lord Jesus. But these Jewish Christians were resisting.

Now, this much is certain. The Lord does not give revival to churches which deny the word or the name of God. Notice how he says that in verse 8. You have kept my word and have not denied my name.

That's why today, you will never expect to see revival in a liberal church. Why? Liberal churches have denied the word of God. They have said the word of God.

The Bible is not the word of God. They have no use for the word, for the scriptures. They are disobeying it.

They are contradicting it at every turn. They have nothing but scorn for the Bible. They have denied the name of Lord Jesus Christ.

He is no longer God incarnate in their eyes. The deity of Christ is generally denied. Now, the Lord is not going to revive a church that has abandoned the truth so fundamental to our faith of the word as the written revelation of God and the Lord Jesus as the living word of God, the Son of God, God incarnate.

So revival means divine opportunities. The Lord Jesus is in control. He controls how and when and why revival comes.

And the opportunity is for us to be a church that is faithful about the business of ministering, of serving, of cultivating godliness in our lives and in our church together. Now, let me come to the second thing that this revival means and it is that revival means difficult obstacles. Notice again in verse 8. He says, I know that you have a little power.

A revived church may face significant deficiencies. This is what I meant when I opened this message today by saying that God does not just show his favor to the big churches, to the ones that have the splashy programs, the ones who are packing out thousands of people. In fact, the very fact that those churches are large is no guarantee that God is actually blessing.

You can engineer that kind of thing. Notice what the Lord Jesus says to the church in Philadelphia. You have a little power.

Now, I think that that statement, little power, may be intentionally vague. What does it mean? Well, the commentators speculate and I think it is true that it could mean at least three things and maybe all three. One, little ability or little capacity.

It may refer to the size of the church. The church here in Philadelphia may have just been a small congregation. And so what you have here is great encouragement for small churches.

The Lord says to this little church, I have put before you an open door. And it rebukes the current thinking that makes everything a matter of numbers, that God is blessing if you have the big crowds the big buildings, the big budgets, and the big staff and all of that, all the big programs. That's the evidence of God's blessing.

No, God says to this little church, I have put before you an open door. Little ability or little capacity because it's small. Secondly, it may mean that it had few resources.

This may have been a church with very limited financial resources. But let's remember, the Lord is not limited. And in fact, as I have included on your bulletin today, that little quotation from the great missionary, J. Hudson Taylor, God's work done God's way will never lack God's supply.

That's true. And we've seen it here in our own ministry and that is an encouragement even for a small church. When God sets before a church an open door, he supplies for their needs.

And then the third thing that it may mean, this little power, may mean negligible importance. This may have been a church with little or no influence, insignificant to all appearances, but that is just the kind of church that the Lord Jesus very often uses, is a church with little significance. These are not the churches that are making the headlines, with the pastors that are on television all of the time or that are constantly in the media or publishing books and all of this kind of thing.

No, this is a little obscure ministry in an out of the way place perhaps and God says, I set before you an open door. The revived church may face significant deficiencies, but so what? God is greater than our deficiencies. In addition, the revived church may face significant dangers.

Now notice in verse 9, Behold, I will cause those of the synagogue of Satan who say that they are Jews and are not, but lie. I will make them come and bow down at your feet and make them know that I have loved you. It may face, this church like this may face a hostile environment.

I've just mentioned about the Jews, the believers in Philadelphia were being harassed apparently by these unbelieving Jews. Now I'm not, I don't have the time to go back into the whole interesting theological discussion of what is truly a Jew, but if you read in the book of Romans and elsewhere in Paul's writings, you find that when he refers to those who are truly Jews, in certain contexts he's speaking spiritually, he's not always speaking in terms of physical descendants. Now Jews are Jews and they have not been replaced by the church.

We understand that. But at the same time, Paul reminds us that those who have the faith of Abraham are the real descendants of Abraham and that's what I think is being said here. They say that they are Jews.

They say they are the ones who really please God. They are the true God worshippers. But the Lord Jesus says, no, they're not.

They're lying. You are the ones who are truly pleasing me. You are the ones who are truly worshipping me.

And I'm going to make them come and bow down at your feet and make them know that I have loved you. That was anathema for the Jews. For the Jews to think that God would love Gentiles? That's exactly what God is saying here.

I think what we need to notice here is that often the severest opponents of revival are religious. Where was the greatest opposition to the church coming from? It was coming from the religious community, the ones who shared the Old Testament together. They still were the opponents, the most hostile opponents of the Christians there in the city of Philadelphia.

But when revival comes, according to this verse, even the unsaved world takes notice that God is at work. You read the histories of the revivals, you see that all of the time. When God awakens a church, it impacts the community and that's exactly what he's saying here.

They're going to come and bow down at your feet and know that I have loved you. Well, the unconverted may not like it, but according to what the Lord Jesus says to this little church, they cannot deny it. They will not be able to deny it.

So revival means difficult obstacles, but let me move to the third thing that revival means, and that is it means decisive outcomes. Revival is not what is often pictured today in the popular religious medium. It's not long, emotional meetings.

It's not a bunch of fanatics dancing in the aisles or rolling on the floors. It's not talking in tongues or it's not a bunch of people who are religious and crazy. It's not that.

In fact, it's not even many conversions, although many conversions often accompany revival. But the reviving of a church is strengthening spiritually. It's God coming in and moving upon the people of God and putting new backbone into them spiritually.

It's God stirring up his people into a new zeal and passion for the truth. And so it is that a revived church is a church that is strengthened spiritually and it's prepared to persevere. I want you to notice here that the revived church may be called upon to endure present trials.

Verse 10, because you have kept the word of my perseverance, notice that phrase, I will also keep you from the hour of testing, that hour which is about to come upon the whole world to test those who dwell on the earth. The revived church will endure present trials. The criterion here is you have kept the word of my perseverance.

Now what does that mean? Well, let's look at it for a moment. Come back with me for a moment to chapter 1. Revelation chapter 1, verse 9. And we read this, I, John, your brother and fellow partaker in the tribulation and kingdom and perseverance which are in Jesus. Notice that phrase, the perseverance which is in Jesus.

He was being persecuted for what? I was on the island called Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. If you hold allegiance to the word of God and give testimony to the Lord Jesus as your savior, there may be a price to pay. For that.

We in America have enjoyed great freedom, religious freedom here, but as anybody can tell you who has spent time in other nations, many other nations of the world don't have that freedom and there are substantial costs to being a Christian in these nations. You have kept the word of my perseverance. Now come to the second chapter for just a moment.

Revelation 2, verses 2 and 3. The letter now to the church at Ephesus, Jesus says, I know your deeds and your toil and perseverance. There's that word again. Now what is this perseverance? You cannot tolerate evil men and you put to the test those who call themselves apostles and they are not and you found them to be false.

What is this perseverance? In part, this perseverance is hanging onto the truth. It's standing for biblical truth, for Christian truth. It is standing on the principles of Orthodox Christian theology and not letting it go.

Verse 3, and you have perseverance and have endured for my namesake and have not grown weary. Perseverance for the Lord Jesus means not growing weary, not giving up when things get hard, not giving up when things get discouraging, but pursuing the cause of Christ in the world in loving the Lord Jesus and his people and lost sinners and being diligent in the work even when you're tired and ready to quit. One other passage I think helps us understand this phrase, perseverance, the word of my perseverance, and that is in Hebrews.

Go back to Hebrews chapter 12. You know these verses well, but let me just remind you. Therefore, verse 1, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us and let us run with, here's our word, endurance, the race that is set before us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before him, he endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

For consider him who has, here it is again, endured such hostility by sinners against himself so that you will not grow weary and lose heart. You have not yet resisted to the point of shedding blood in your striving against sin. And so, it is, this endurance is continuing, difficult as it can be sometimes, it is continuing that warfare against sin in our lives.

Laying aside the sin that so easily entangles us, laying aside the sin that trips us up, and running patiently, the race set before us with our eyes fixed firmly on the Lord Jesus Christ who has run before us. He is the one who endured the hostility of sinners against himself. We can do the same.

He endured the cross, despising the shame. We can endure and take the shame of the Lord Jesus Christ because just as he sat down at the right hand of the throne of God, someday we also shall be with him in glory. So, the revived church endures present trials.

Secondly, the revived church, we are told here, will escape future tribulation. Now listen carefully on this point. The church that has kept the word of our Lord's perseverance, he will keep from, and the word is literally, that little preposition is literally out of, he will keep out of the hour of testing which is about to come on the earth.

Now, obviously, he is talking primarily, first reference here is to the tribulation period that is coming. However, as we know, the church of Philadelphia was existing two thousand years ago and we still haven't come to the tribulation yet. So, what else is he saying here? Well, I say, I think he's saying that he will keep them from the hour of testing even more immediately.

A church that is obedient, God will protect. Now here is what happened in Philadelphia, endured the ravages of the Muslim invaders. The Muslim hordes came through that area and conquered all of these other cities, but this city was spared.

This city was delivered. Now the reference, ultimately, to the great tribulation, chapter six through nineteen, but it is implied that many churches will not escape tribulation because they have not been faithful. And so, even when the Lord Jesus returns, when he comes back to earth again, there are going to be churches that are going to be sucked into the tribulation.

They will not be among those who are caught up to meet the Lord Jesus in the air, but because they have denied him and they have been unfaithful to him, they will go through this period of tribulation. Throughout history, there is a long period, there is a long history record of the fact that churches that have remained faithful to Christ have very often thrived even though sometimes they suffered. The Lord Jesus has been with them in a very special way and that promise, I think, still holds.

In the fourth place then, revival means one other thing and that is definite obligations. Now I come to verses eleven to thirteen. What if the Lord would grant us revival in our churches? We pray for that.

Well, there are certain obligations that will belong to us and let's look at them briefly. Verse eleven, I am coming quickly. Hold fast what you have so that no one will take your crown.

Verse eleven tells us that we must retain the Lord's blessings. There is an obligation. When God revives his church, God's people are to retain their blessings.

In light of Christ's coming, we'll strive to conserve the work of revival, making use of every opportunity we have. That means purifying ourselves doctrinally, purifying ourselves spiritually, serving faithfully in the church. For what purpose? Well, he says so that no one will take your crown.

Now what does that mean? Well, I think it's the same type of thing that John writes in his second epistle. In the book of 2 John, verse eight, here's what he says there to the one whom he calls the chosen lady, the one to whom he's writing. Verse eight of 2 John, watch yourselves that you do not lose what we have accomplished, but that you may receive a full reward.

I think that's what he's saying here. The Lord Jesus is saying here, watch yourselves. I'm coming quickly, so hold on, hold fast to what you have.

Watch yourselves so that you do not lose what we have accomplished. That's the great challenge for any church that experiences revival is to maintain, to retain those blessings to not let it go. We understand the door doesn't remain open forever, but hang on to the blessings so that we don't lose what we have accomplished.

Secondly, we must maintain our own faithfulness. Verse 12, he who overcomes. I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God and he will not go out from it anymore.

I will write on him the name of my God, the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem which comes down out of heaven from my God and my new name. Now, the church member who overcomes the loss of the flesh, the power of Satan, the seduction of the world is going to become a pillar in the temple of God. Now, what does he mean here? Well, let me read to you a little bit from an old encyclopedia article on the city of Philadelphia.

This article, which was written in the 19th century, said that at the time of writing that there were six mosques in town. Well, there are five churches in the town besides 20 others which are too old or too small for use and six minarets indicating as many mosques are seen in the town. And one of these mosques is believed by the native Christians to have been the church in which assembled the primitive Christians addressed in the Apocalypse.

There are few ruins, but in one part there are still found four strong marble pillars which supported the dome of a church. The dome itself has fallen down, but its remains may be observed and it is seen that the arch was of brick. Now, notice this.

On the sides of the pillars are inscriptions and some architectural ornaments in the form of the figures of saints. One solitary pillar of high antiquity has often been noticed as reminding beholders of the remarkable words in the apocalyptic message to the Philadelphia church, him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God and he shall go no more out. So the church, whether at this time or not, eventually had building that had these pillars and on these pillars were inscriptions.

And the Lord Jesus said I will mark you out as belonging to me. He who overcomes, overcomes sin in his life, overcomes the world, overcomes all of the temptations to fall away from the faith, he who overcomes I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God. I will give him stability.

He will have a strong testimony for me there in the church. He will not abandon the body. Notice they will, he says they will not go out from it anymore.

We know that many of the residents of Philadelphia fled the city, especially after the earthquake of A.D. 17. Many of them never came back to the city. They stayed out in the country areas and farmed.

They didn't want to live in the city because of the dangers of the earthquakes. But here we have a promise that they will never go out from the city anymore. Instead he will give the credentials of heavenly citizenship.

And notice, again, he talks about the city of Philadelphia. He talks about my new name. And I've already mentioned to you how the city of Philadelphia had three different names, had been renamed twice.

And so we must maintain our faithfulness. If we maintain our faithfulness we will be established like a pillar. And then thirdly we must remain in the Holy Spirit.

Verse 13, he who has an ear let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. We have to ask the question constantly what is the Holy Spirit saying? How is he leading? A great challenge that we have as Christians is to remain faithful and sensitive to the work of the Holy Spirit. To remain in a state of soul where we can hear him and where we can respond to him.

And when the Spirit says, do this, do it. When the Spirit says, go here, do this ministry, I want you to do this or that, that we respond, that we understand that it is the Spirit of God speaking. Let him hear what the

Spirit says to the churches.

Now this little church in Philadelphia proved to be a fortress of faithfulness. It's interesting that long after the Muslims had swept through Asia Minor and the peoples had succumbed to Islam, including the people of the other seven, the others of the seven, the other six cities to whom the Lord Jesus addressed letters, that the city of Philadelphia held out as an enclave of Christianity. In fact, it's amazing but it's true that they held out as a Christian city until the year 1392.

That's 1300 years after this letter was written. When all of the other cities had capitulated to Islam, Philadelphia was holding out as a Christian city. Can a small church reasonably pray for and hope for revival? The answer is yes.

Size has nothing to do with it. Neither do lack of material wealth or apparent insignificance. If the Lord Jesus chooses to revive a congregation, the hostility of the world cannot, cannot prevent it from being revived.

Cannot prevent it from prevailing in a godless culture that cannot quench it. In other words, when the Lord opens the door, no one else can close it. Now this is an important truth I think for us today because in our evangelical world, there is a great deal of door forcing going on.

And that's why we have all of these programs. We have all of these different approaches, these conferences and books and seminars and all of these things that are trying to tell us today how to, quote, do church. Because there is a sense today that the church is not relevant to our 21st century culture.

And so there are all of these different trends and developments. You listen to some of this and it's just, it's so sad. It makes you want to weep.

What people are grasping at in order to try to find meaning in churches. There's a lot of door forcing. If we can just entertain the people, if we can just change the message a little bit so that the people on the outside will be attracted inside, then we have a chance to lead them to Christ and build a big church.

Well, we are taking our own ideas. We are using our own imaginations very often. We are taking techniques that have proved useful in the business world or in the political world and we're attempting to force open spiritual doors.

What I'm saying to you today is that that must always be something that we resist. We need to resist this because the Lord Jesus Christ is the sovereign Lord of the church. He said, I will build my church and we dare not get in the way of him doing that.

And sometimes, sometimes it doesn't seem like he's building. Sometimes we begin to question whether the Lord Jesus is at work. But I can guarantee you that the Lord Jesus meant it when he said, I will build my church and the gates of hell will not prevail against it.

So how do we prepare for revival? Well, I think this letter to Philadelphia gives us insight. By diligently keeping God's word, by resolutely refusing to deny his name, this means doing more than paying mere lip service to the Bible. It means believing God's word.

It means living God's word. It means loving the Son of God and glorifying him and living according to his will. It means committed, being committed to obedience even when it's not convenient and even when it's

not comfortable and willing to stand courageously in the face of hostility from the world or from other religions for the sake of the Lord Jesus.

It means resisting the seduction of the culture in which we live. It means refusing to be worldly. It means refusing the seduction of the world's godless philosophies or caving to the world's perverse morality.

And so my brothers and sisters today, let's add this to our prayers. We've been praying, oh Lord, will you not yourself revive us again that your people may rejoice in you? Lord, revive us in your word. Revive us according to your covenant, loyalty, your promises.

Revive us according to your righteousness. Oh Lord, revive your work in the midst of the years. In the midst of the years, make it known.

We will not let you go until you bless us. Now let's add to these prayers this one. Lord, open the door.

Open the door that only you can open and no one can shut. Lord, that is our heart's desire today. Open the door.

Here at Wading River Baptist Church, Father, open the door. Open the door for revival, for spiritual awakening that we as a church congregation might be stirred up into new zeal and passion. Lord, we feel our need very intensely.

Lord, we're so spiritually lethargic sometimes it's so easy to get caught up in the world. Sometimes our affections are not set on things above, but rather they're set on things here on the earth. We grovel in all of the mess of the world.

Oh Lord, cleanse us, we pray. Purge us from our sins. Open the door of revival that we might be brought back into a godly walk with the Lord Jesus Christ.

Then also, Father, that we might impact our community for Christ. Father, glorify yourself in us, we pray. Do so because Lord, even though sometimes it may cost us, we realize that it never costs us as much as it costs the Lord Jesus Christ.

He, whose sacred head was wounded on that cross of Calvary, whose hands were pierced by those nails, whose feet were pierced by those spikes, whose side was pierced by that sword and whose brow was pierced by that crown of thorns. He was wounded for our transgressions. So Father, as we come to the Lord's table today, we pray that we may do so.

Again, a renewed realization of what it cost him and therefore that we may be prepared to endure, to keep the word of our Lord's perseverance in these days as we await the coming of the one who has the key of David. We pray it in his name. Amen.

As we prepare for the Lord's

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