

 **Main Street**
UNITED METHODIST CHURCH



Revelation 3:7-13
“Church Of The Open Door”

May 8, 2016
(7th Sunday After Easter/ Ascension Day)

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“Following Christ From City Center!”

IIF. REVELATION 3:7-13 "CHURCH OF THE OPEN DOOR"

6/7 Letters

1) v.7a Introductory "Angelic" Formula.

Little Athens! (many temples), 30 m. S.E. of Sardis

Neo-Caesarea After Rebuild, Then *Philadelphia Flavius*, Rich Agriculture

7a "And to the angel of the **church** in Philadelphia write: Vineyards(Bacchus), Wool/Leather, Earthquakes (A.D. 17, 61)

2) v.7b 4 Characterization of the Lord: 2 O.T. Titles + 2 Who Functions,(// Key, 1:18).

2 Divine Titles + Action: Jesus Controls Access: New Jerusalem/God's House/Kingdom

b 1 "The words of 'The *Holy One*,' *Holy One* = Title For God, 4:8, //6:10, (Is. 1:4, 5:19, 40:25, 43:15, 65:16)

2 'The *True One*,' = *Reliable*, Also Title For God, Is. 40:25, Rev. 6:10, Ex. 34:16

3 'who has the key of David, Is. 9:6, 22:20-22 (Shebna To Eliakim: Hezekiah's Palace), 1:18 (Death/Hades), 9:1, Heb. 3:6

4 who opens and no one shall shut, who shuts and no one opens." Is. 45:1, Access, Mt. 16:19, 18:18, Jn. 20:23

Expulsion from Synagogue? 12th Benediction, Jamnia 90A.D., Jn. 9:22, 12:42, 16:2

3) vv.8-10 Praise Formula, "I Know" (2x), "Behold" (3x).

Struggle With Jewish Synagogue Like Smyrna, Only Praise//2:8-11

8a a "I know your works. Evangelistic Opportunity? Acts 14:27, I Cor. 16:9, II Cor. 2:12, Col. 4:3

Behold, I have set before you **an open door**, which no one is able to shut; 4:1, God's Presence, See *From Above*

Not Much Social Strength, Prestige: Small/Poor?

b b1 I know that you have but little power, Depend On God's Power! Synagogue Problem//Smyrna Had Little Wealth

and yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name. v.10a, Depend On God = Put Strength To Good Use

Church Vulnerable To Authorities/Synagogue, Expelled? (Jn. 9:22, 34)

9a 2. Behold, I will make those of the synagogue of Satan who say they are Jews and are not, but lie- 2:9, 13, 24

66-95AD = Jewish/Christian Identity Crisis/Conflict & Rivalry

b 2' behold, I will make them come and bow down before your feet, Phil. 2:10, Acknowledge Jesus' People

and learn that **I have loved you.** Mal. 1:2, Jer. 31:3, Little Group, Who Are God's People, Old And New?

Role Reversal As Gentiles: Is. 60:14, 45:14, 49:23, 43:3-4, 1 Enoch 90:30

10 1' Because you have kept my word of patient endurance, Not A Pre-Trib Rapture Text, God's Opponents, 6:10, 8:13

I will keep you from the hour of trial which is coming on 'the whole world,' p.v., Bar. 32:1, 17:10, 22:6, 4 Ezra 4:7-8

to try 'those who dwell upon the earth.' Protect, Not Exempt: 1 Jn. 5:18, Jn. 17:15, Mart. Polycarp 19.1

7:1-8, 8:13, Dan. 12:1, Woes Before New Age Arrives, e.g. Mk. 13, 2 Baruch 32:1, 40:2, 71:1

4) Chastisement Omitted // Smyrna.

Christ Not Take Them Out Of World, But Comes To Protect Them In It

5) v.11 Call to Repentance Omitted, Encouragement Offered.

Sam & Dave, "Hold On, I'm Coming!" Not Over Till It's Over!

11 **I am coming soon**; 1 Thess. 4:13-18, Phil. 4:5, 1 Cor. 15:52, Powerful Word Of Hope, 2:16, 25, Imminent End?

hold fast to what you have, so that no one may seize your crown ("wreath"). Possible Loss, Real Competition

2:10, IQS 4:7

7) v.12 Two Promised Rewards to Conquerors/ "Name," (3x) "My God" (4x).

History Of Earthquakes, Rich Lived Outside City, Potent Images Of Stability

12a a He who conquers, Not Assimilate To Imperial Culture/Babylon! Temple Pillar = City Reward

I will make him a pillar in the temple of *my God*; Is. 56:5, Naos = Inner, Gal. 2:9 For Apostles, 1 Pt. 2:5

never shall he go out of it, Vs. Synagogue, No Earthquakes Here, "Dwell in house of Lord forever," Ps. 23:6

New Address. A Place Of Honor And Security In God's Very Presence

a b1 and I will write on him the name of *my God*, Ancient Pillars Often Inscribed, (3-fold name), 14:1-5, 22:4

2 and the name of the city of *my God*, Not Man-Made City, Honor/Security In God's Presence, 6:9-11, 21:9-10

2' the new Jerusalem which is coming down from *my God* out of heaven, New Order Is Coming Down, 21:2, 10

1' and my own new name. Punch Line! Name = Change Of Status, Ancient Reward: Foundation, 14:1-4, 19:12-16

The City Was Twice Given New Imperial Names: *Neocaesaria, Flavia*

6) v.13 Call to Hear What the Spirit Says.

13 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the **churches**! Are We Listening?

Guilds and Associations in the Roman World (Reddish: 66)

"Clubs and associations afforded opportunities of common worship, enjoyment of social intercourse, and in some cases the satisfaction of holding office. These societies further promoted a spirit of comradeship and mutual aid in time of difficulty. Most of them tended to funerary responsibilities and provided tombstones. Associations formed the natural organization for foreigners and foreign worship entering a city. Clubs were associated with a deity, often met in a temple, offered libations and sacrifices, and ate meat from idol temples. . . Political, economic, and family life and public entertainment were organized around the pagan deities; so also were the ordinary social groupings." (Everett Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity*, 2d ed. [Grand Rapids, MI:Eerdmans, 1993], 136.)

CHURCH OF THE OPEN DOOR

"Behold, I have set before you an open door, which no one is able to shut...."

Genuine opportunities come from the throne of God with local addresses.

REVELATION 3 : 8 b

When I read the words of William Shakespeare or Sir Winston Churchill aloud—as I do at times, but only in private—I use a different voice. Fake British accent, a bit more dramatic, not quite so Southern. But I will spare you my thespian affectations. In the fourth act of the Shakespeare’s play *Julius Caesar*, Brutus seeks to enlist Cassius in his plot to kill Caesar with these famous lines:

“There is a tide in the affairs of men
Which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune;
Omitted, all the voyage of their life
Is bound in shallows and in miseries.
On such a full sea we are now afloat;
And we must take the current when it serves
Or lose our ventures.”¹

Behind the imagery is the fact that before dredging it was necessary to wait for a high tide to float a ship over shallow waters at the mouth of a port which had silted because of the narrows. If no wind, the tide provides power as well as a lift over shoals and sandbars. But if the tide is missed, you wait for the next, and until then—as Shakespeare notes with pathos, you are “bound in shallows and miseries.” The Latin term for this was *ob portu*, a ship standing *over against port*, waiting for the right moment to ride the tide in or out of the harbor. And from it comes our word *opportunity*, which is a moment of challenge and risk, and so the question is, “Shall we take it or not?” “And we must take the current when it serves/ Or lose our ventures.” But opportunities are not like tides; they do not come twice a day on schedule.

¹ Quoted in Bruce Thieleman, “Tide Rising,” *Preaching Today*, Tape No. 30.

Revelation 3:7-13..... 4

Chuck Swindoll writes, “We’re all faced with innumerable opportunities brilliantly disguised as impossible situations.” Thomas Edison quipped, “Opportunity is missed by most because it’s dressed in overalls and looks like work.”² There's a joke among Methodist preachers that when the Superintendent informs you the bishop has a great *opportunity*, you should run.

Before us is an announcement from the risen Jesus delivered by means of a circular letter to seven churches from the prophet John. Verse 8, “I know your works,” he assures his friends, “Behold, I have set before you *an open door* which no one is able to shut.” To a church with *little power*, a church under great pressure, “bound in shallows and miseries,” Jesus offers a gift. A chance to unfurl the sails and catch a rising tide. In an open door Jesus says, “Come and join in this new thing.” Open doors come to individuals, and it is the stuff of which memoirs are written, but the most important come to the church as a whole, and that is the stuff of which church history is written.

On Thursday evening we hosted the National Day of Prayer; it was an intense time of prayer for an open door here in Greenwood. We heard a testimony from Pastor Eric Hill of Lakeview Baptist who— after seventeen days of fasting and prayer beginning the first of January— saw a hundred and six people converted in the next 35 days of nightly meetings. What is God up to? And why was so little notice paid? A church in our area had a visitation. They walked through an open door, and it stayed open for a bit over a month. Now they have to disciple all the messy baby Christians God gave them to care for, and I hear it’s quite a challenge.

TURNING TO THE TEXT

The words of the risen Jesus to his servants in Philadelphia are a personal address, “And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write....” This is an acknowledgment that as in politics, all religion is local. There are no churches *in general*, only churches *in particular*, each embedded in a local culture and as individual as fingerprints or DNA. That is why we cannot simply copy the program of another church. Ministries cannot be cloned, though they can be seeded.

Jesus did not send one letter to seven churches but seven to seven churches, each of which acknowledges local culture and challenges. Two have nothing good

² Both quotes from search under “opportunity,” *PreachingToday.com*.

Revelation 3:7-13..... 5

said about them, two nothing but good, and the other three some of both. Philadelphia was one of the two that received only praise, and they show us what it looks like to be poised on the edge of opportunity. God has something customized for us, something that catches up the diverse threads of our history and weaves them into a bold new pattern. “And to the angel of the red brick church that sits at Main and Cambridge, write....”

Dare we believe there is a word for us as there was for Philadelphia? I do, but we have to *hear it together* if we’re going to *go there together*. My best guess is it has to do with our redemptive gift of hospitality here at the center of Greenwood. We will make new disciples of Christ by welcoming them and giving them space to explore the classic Christian faith and our own local spin. Come. Worship. Eat with us. Ask questions. Discover. Belong to Jesus Christ and his people in this place.

The earliest Christians had a huge spiritual and intellectual and religious and cultural and communications problem. The one God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the one who revealed to Moses the divine name *Yahweh– I am who I am* or *I will be who I will be*, this selfsame God had shown them something new of the divine inner life. The one God of the Jews in effect said, “I am also three persons in full surrender to one another, each pouring love and life and honor into one another and constituted in our persons by the same.” The divine life of the one God is a relationally complex communion of three persons. Three gods and one God is a contradiction, as is one person and three persons, but one God in three persons is not a contradiction but a careful way to speak of what God revealed.

From the start the apostles and other foundational witnesses were convinced from their experience of Jesus and reflection on Scripture that no language worked for Jesus but *God language*. Not angel language, not prophet or spokesman language, not just virtue language as if Jesus was fine Jewish guy with a great mom whom God promoted for excellent performance, but only God language in the full sense.³ Only God language is sufficient to capture what actually happened through Jesus, why it happened, and what it means for the world.

³ For a defense of Jesus self-acknowledged deity– albeit in a parabolic and indirect Jewish manner– see Brant Pitre, *The Case for Jesus* (New York, NY: Image, 2016), Chapter 9, “Did Jesus Think He Was God,” 119-136, and Chapter 10, “The Secret Of Jesus’ Divinity,” 137-154. Also James Edwards, *Is Jesus The Only Savior* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2005), Chapter 5, “Did Jesus Consider Himself God?” 67-99.

Revelation 3:7-13..... 6

What was said of the God of Israel must now be said of him. If the Lord is *The Holy One* and *The True And Utterly Reliable One*, as Isaiah said, then so is Jesus.⁴ And so is the Holy Spirit, though working out the details and arriving at the stable Trinitarian formularies of the Nicene Creed took centuries longer. The Son and the Spirit are of the same and not just a similar nature and substance as the Father.⁵

The new insights jangled their Jewish sensitivities and caused major problems with local synagogues who saw it as a move back towards polytheism, but this is what the church had to say if they were to respond adequately to the divine revelation they received. Jesus is the human face of the God of the Jews, the one he called *Father*, and in him the Spirit works as in no one else. Sent by the God the Father, God the Son as Jesus is guided and empowered by God the Spirit, and when you see the historical life of Jesus through these lenses, you share the church's faith.

The image that John uses for this is found in Isaiah's promise to Eliakim that he would receive the key to the royal house of David, then occupied by King Hezekiah and would be- in effect- his chief of staff and appointment secretary able to grant or withhold access, "... who opens and no one shall shut; who shuts and no one opens." The analogy is that Jesus Christ holds the single key into God's kingdom so that through him alone we have access to the Father. He alone is the divinely approved outlet for knowledge of the Triune God. It's what his resurrection means since it stamps him fully approved and the only one so validated. He is "the way, the truth and the life" to use the language of John's Gospel.⁶ He is the single key who *opens and no one shall shut, who shuts and no one shall open*. There is no salvation outside the Son who comes to us from inside the Triune life, and wherever God's salvation is experienced, whether in this life by believers or at the portal of the next by those without a chance to hear of Jesus but who have responded to God's grace and the light given and so are oriented in the right direction, it will be through Jesus Christ. Not Buddha, not Mohammed, not Vishnu, but Jesus.

This is the most intellectually offensive claim of the Christian Church because it is so exclusive. Not that the church is perfect; we are but the broken clay pot that contains the treasure of the truths about the Living and Trine God. So don't stop at

⁴ Rev. 6:10 of God and 3:7 of Jesus.

⁵ Greek *homoousious* (same nature), not just *homoiousios* (like nature).

⁶ 14:6.

Revelation 3:7-13..... 7

the humble container and complain about hypocrisy and sin in the church. We all know that, and nobody better than us pastors. No one can embody the fullness of this revelation, not even its custodians. It's bigger than us all. So look past the lowly container to the treasure within, written in a big black book called the Bible, preached in sermons, sung in hymns, confessed in creeds, celebrated in the sacraments, lived out by the faithful across the ages, extended around the world in missions, probed by the theologians, all pointing past themselves to one single point of reference, to Jesus: Jewish Messiah, God the Son in flesh, the key to every good future, the one who opens the door for us back into the life of God. We in the church say some outlandish things about this man Jesus, and not until you have felt the utter offense of them can you ask the next question, "But what if it's true?"

The church at Philadelphia needed a reminder just who it was that stood behind the open door. It is an invitation from the risen Jesus with the blessing of the Father and the empowering of the Spirit to help them hear and then obey, "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches." God is in dialog with them about their future, and the image is of a door swinging open into heaven.⁷ They are about to see things from God's perspective, and that- friends- is the greatest gift. When we see people through God's eyes, in all their wonder and sorrow, we will have no trouble speaking to them about the Savior, just as a physician has no trouble writing a script for an antibiotic. People are precious to God, and they need what we have to offer, better *who*. Our job is to walk through open doors and offer him.

Philadelphia was not outwardly impressive as a church. A frank evaluation is given from on high, "I know that you have but little power." Being the vendor of the newest religion in town was not easy in a world that prized antiquity as a measure of truth. For a while they were able to hide under the legal umbrella of the local Jewish synagogue with its many adherents, and that was not a disingenuous move. If asked, "Who are the true heirs of Israel?" believers in Jesus answered, "We are true Jews because we follow Messiah Jesus." But as numbers grew of Gentiles grew and the implications of such an unusual Messiah became clear, the synagogue withdrew its umbrella of legitimacy and shut the door. The Christians were put, as it were, *outside the door*, and therefore more vulnerable to government and economic harassment.

It was a bitter thing. Old friends now enemies, no longer able to hear the Scriptures or pray together the Psalms. One turning a neighbor, even a brother or sister, into the authorities as no longer certifiable Jewish. It was a religious minority

⁷ 4:1.

Revelation 3:7-13..... 8

using its social privilege and connections against an even smaller minority.

Yes, the Jews did it to the Christians for a short time in the first and second centuries, but we have done it to them for a much longer time with far graver consequences. Anti-Judaism is part of the shame of church history; it is a cancerous idea that arises time and again when people are looking for a scapegoat. It is on the rise in Europe again, fueled by immigrants from the Middle East and versions of Islam that are virulently anti-Jewish. For the church to forget or minimize the Jewishness of Jesus is an invitation to pogrom and holocaust. My Savior is a Jew, and by faith in him I am spiritually Jewish, an adopted child of Abraham. And if strong language was used against the synagogue in Philadelphia as the *synagogue of Satan* in a way that makes us wince, might it not have been used with even more weight by Jews in Germany of Lutheran and Catholic churches who were coopted by the agenda of National Socialism and were silent as Jews vanished from their communities at night. Where were the friends of Jesus the Jew?

It had already happened once to Israel in exile in Babylon as the Jews were forced to bow before their captors, and so Isaiah promised that one day God would show the Gentiles who his people were and make these pagans come and bow down at their feet. And, when the synagogue turned against the church late in the first century, the same ancient promise was claimed by the church in a grand reversal that now it would be the Jews who would one day bow before them in the same way.⁸ But when two thousand years of church history has shown is that the church can also abuse power against Jews, and even other believers, who is left to bow before whom? God will have to sort it all out in the end, with this footnote. God knows who are his. God knows who has remained faithful to his Word and his Son under pressures great and small, and at a time of God's own choosing, all will publicly acknowledge this.

Have you heard of *The Great Escape*? It's a new doctrine available only since the 1830's when it was first proposed by John Nelson Darby in England. And since it's a recent innovation in Christian thought, it's immediately suspect.⁹ It has had an

⁸ For this reading of vv.8-10 I am indebted to Catherine and Justo Gonzalez, *Revelation* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox, 1997), 34-45.

⁹ See James Efird, *End-Times: Rapture, Anti-Christ, Millenium: What The Bible Says* (Nashville, TN: Abington, 1986) for a popular treatment of the rise of dispensationalism and its effect on popular American Christianity. The standard treatment is Ernest R. Sandeen, *The Roots of Fundamentalism: British and American Millenarianism*,

Revelation 3:7-13..... 9

appeal to some British and vast numbers American Christians who cannot imagine going through persecution or martyrdom for the faith. So Darby, a disenchanted Anglican and founder of the Plymouth Brethren, creates a new theological system that has the church getting out of the world before things melt down just before the end. What I call *The Great Escape* is more popularly known as *The Rapture*, and despite its popularity in a recent novels, is a teaching of escapism that is *read into Scripture* from outside rather than *read from Scripture*. It is not in the text but requires a pre-commitment in order to read the Bible from such an odd angle. There is no *go up before the blow up*; the church remains in history and will be preserved to the end.

The church affirms in the Creeds that history is headed towards a collision with the kingdom of God and the vindication of Jesus Christ. I believe in the sudden return of Jesus to judge the living and the dead. What I do not accept is the schemes and timetables of those who stitch together verses from across the Bible to prove something that the central tradition of the Church has never affirmed.

Some things we just don't know. God has not revealed them. They are none of our business.¹⁰ What God has revealed is enough to keep us busy for a long time. We don't escape. We are not protected *from* trouble so much as we are preserved *through* it. This is the clear intent of verse 10, not *the great escape of the church* but *the great preservation of the church* in the midst of a world under God's judgment, "Because you have kept my word of patient endurance, I will keep you from the hour of trial which is coming on the whole world, to try those who dwell upon the earth." So read the novels, but don't get your theology or ethics from them. I also know that escapism and being an insider to supposed prophecy sells well and brings in lots of money because of the fear on which it preys. There is always pressure to produce the latest and the greatest version of *The Late Great Planet Earth*. And all are wrong.

I have read the history of the rise of this new doctrine and find it not only bogus but dangerous. For the Christian there is no escape but death or the return of Christ, and I expect I will experience the first before the second. Jesus could trust the church at Philadelphia with a magnificent open door because they had been faithful under pressure without escaping.

1800-1930 (Chicago, ILL: University of Chicago Press, 1970). See Ben Witherington's analysis of dispensationalism at "Where Did Rapture Theology Come From?" YouTube, www.youtube.com/watch?v=d_cVXdr8mVs.

Revelation 3:7-13..... 10

So here's Pastor Phil's rough-and-ready rule of thumb. If it sounds easy, it's probably wrong. If it looks like privilege instead of responsibility, it's probably wrong. If it's not clearly read from Scripture within the framework of the great creeds, it's probably wrong. If it promotes elitism and escapism, it's probably wrong. And when I ask people to show me the rapture in the Bible, they fumble around and say, "Well it's in there somewhere," or "I heard it last week from a TV preacher," neither of which impresses me. I'm sorry to disappoint you; it's just not true. Show it to me in the Bible. Show it to me in the fathers of the early Church. Show it to me in the central stream of Christian doctrine. And if you can't, forget it!

Verse 11, "I am coming soon; hold fast to what you have, so that no one may seize your crown." There is no necessity to read the phrase *I am coming soon* as a reference to the return of Jesus at the end of the age. The simple fact is that he did not come in that way then, and he has not come yet. This coming is a coming *within history* to that church at that time and has already happened. What form it precisely took is not clear; we are not told. But Jesus is always near; he is aware; he gives them an open door and will soon bring relief if they remain faithful under pressures.

Twenty years ago I had a friend David Deems who was a Mission Society missionary deep in China. Chinese believers affectionately call him *an egg*, meaning David has become so much like them he was *white on the outside* but *yellow on the inside*. It took eight years of teaching in China and earning trust before he was allowed even to go near the unreached people God called him to evangelize. They live in an area of Western China forbidden to outsiders. Here is a piece of a letter:

"I am still thrilled to be able to live and work in Dongxiang and follow my Lord's leading to share his love and salvation. But recently I've been so aware of what a precarious battle we are in to do battle for the kingdom. Talking with a Dongxiang brother two nights ago, he said, 'We have to be so careful about talking about Jesus. If others know, they'll beat me, and I and my family will be in trouble. If they know you are missionaries, they'll beat you, and you will never get back into the country.' Yes, Satan is pressing us hard. Facing the communist government, totally Satanic social structure, and the harsh poverty and conditions here, *hanging in there* is our reality. But my brother says, 'Anyway, I choose Christ.' And we say, 'Whom have we to fear?'"

Once, when on furlough, David came to see me Georgetown. About 3:00 pm I took him for a late lunch to a local sea food restaurant that sits on Winyah Bay. The

Revelation 3:7-13..... 11

place was empty except for the two of us. I sat facing the door with him sitting with his back to the entrance. He was tall and skinny, wearing Bermuda shorts, wing-tip shoes, and men’s stretch socks to the knees, the very picture of a geek, totally out of touch with fashion sense from his years in a cotton Chinese uniform. I was engrossed in his mission stories when– behind his back– a group of long-haired, bearded men walked in and pulled together several tables. When I saw the man who walked in last, Randy Owen, I knew who they were. It was *Alabama*, then at the height of their fame with their own theater in Myrtle Beach. Apparently they find showing up late to eat cuts down on autograph hounds and swooning females.

Since it’s my policy not to bother the famous if I see them, I looked back at David without saying a word. I somehow refrained from breaking into “Down home, where they know you by name and treat you like family.” It was then that I heard *the voice* of the Good Shepherd, and the sound of it is a piercing as it was gentle. It always startles me, and it came as a question, “So, Phil, who are you more impressed with, my servant David, or country music royalty?” I bowed my head inwardly and replied in a thought, “Lord, I’m more impressed with your servant David who has no idea who these men are and is risking his life to reach an unreached people group in China.” It was for me a moment of clarification. We finished our meal and walked by them on the way out without saying a word. David had an *open door* in China, and I found one at the restaurant that day.

I’m a bit ashamed of it, but in moments of self-pity I confess to feeling I don’t belong anywhere. I no longer live in Cheraw where I once enjoyed a deep sense of roots and belonging. You graciously let us live in your parsonage, but it’s not mine, and one day I’ll move. I’m not allowed to be a member of a local church, my membership being in the Annual Conference which meets once a year for a business meeting. I know this sounds silly and self-serving, but unless you’ve been an itinerant minister who comes and goes, you may not understand. One day, while feeling this way, *the voice* came, “But you belong to me, and isn’t that enough?” My answer? “No, not right now it isn’t, but thanks for the reminder.”

We know from ancient historians that ancient Philadelphia was in a highly active earthquake zone with a major quake in AD 17 that destroyed the place and was rebuild only with a big tax break from Rome, after which the city was renamed *Neocaesarea* or *New Caesar*. Another less serious shake was in AD 61, only thirty or so years before the church received it’s letter, and that time it was renamed *Flavius*, the family name of the current emperor. So stability, or the lack thereof, and name changes were a big deal in Philadelphia. So shaky was the place that those

Revelation 3:7-13..... 12

who could afford it lived outside the city and commuted in when needed. It is for this reason that the imagery of verse 12 and 13 is all about stability and a new identity.

Pillars in temples on earth may move in earthquakes, but not the coming temple of God. They belong, and if you want to know to whom they're dedicated and who placed them there, you have only to read the inscriptions. Three times for emphasis we hear about the new identity, that on us is inscribed, "the *name* of my God, and the *name* of the city of my God..., and my own *new name*." I belong to the Father, the one Jesus four times named as *my God* and then— as the punch line— applied it to himself in the phrase *my own new name*, which is an indirect claim to deity. My true citizenship is not here; I belong to the new Jerusalem, the coming kingdom of God already making its mark through the church on the world here below. So perhaps my longing for belonging is more than self-indulgent, self-serving sentiment. Maybe it's a sign some deeper passion is clearing a space in my heart, that I am beginning to understand that nothing on earth can satisfy and that all our lodgings are temporary.

After forty years in Africa as a missionary, Henry C. Morrison headed home by boat on the same ship as President Teddy Roosevelt. Morrison confessed to feeling dejected when, on entering New York Harbor, Roosevelt received a great fanfare and welcome. Morrison thought that he should get some recognition for forty years in the Lord's service. Then *the voice* came to Morrison, "Henry, you're not home yet."¹¹

CONCLUSION

I wake up in the middle of the night thinking about this stuff. "Lord," I ask, "what are you doing here at Main Street? I think I feel the love of God yearning to draw people to himself through the church. People are going to be saved here. Marriages are going to be healed as well as bodies. Addictions are going to be broken and deep inner wounds healed. People are going to be called into the ministry and missions. Retired people are going to become lay workers and evangelists. Things are going to happen as God turns up the awareness of his holy presence and we become a people who worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness and actually enjoy prayer. Church is going to be fun and also frightening as we learn just how much Jesus loves people and how much he hates sin and evil. It's going to be messy; revival always is.

What's that noise? Do you hear it? I think I hear a door opening.

¹¹ Michael Green, ed., *Illustrations for Biblical Preaching* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1990, 306),
