

Revelation

SERMON SERIES, CHAPTER 3

“God of the Open Door”

Once in a state out west, there was a bounty set of \$5,000 for each wolf captured alive!! Sam and Jed thought of all that money (\$5,000 for each wolf!) ... and overnight they decided to become hunters. They set out and searched the mountains day and night for wolves, hoping to get rich. After several days without capturing a single wolf, they fell asleep from exhaustion. In the middle of the night, Sam woke up to see that they were surrounded by 50 wolves, with their teeth bared and they were growling. He nudged his partner and whispered, “Jed, wake up! We’re rich!”

Most people would have panicked because of the danger of being killed by the wolves. But Sam saw it as an opportunity.

Today I want to ask you: What opportunity has God set before you?

This is what Jesus said to the church in Philadelphia:

“These are the words of Him who is holy and true, who holds the key of David. What He opens no one can shut, and what He shuts no one can open.”
Revelation 3:7,8

This is the Church of the open door. The “Open Door” is a metaphor, a word picture, for Opportunity. An “Open Door” is a word picture for Opportunity. It’s used a number of times like this in the Bible. In 1st Corinthians chapter 16, Paul says, *“But I will stay on at Ephesus ... because a great door for effective work has opened to me”* (1 Cor. 16:9). The same metaphor is used in 2nd Corinthians: *“Now when I went to Troas to preach the gospel of Christ and found that the Lord had opened a door for me...”* (2 Cor. 2:12). To the Colossians Paul said, *“Pray ... that God may open a door for our message, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ”* (Col.4:3). An open door stands for the opportunity to be used by God.

Now, the church at Philadelphia was not wealthy or powerful – insignificant in many respects. But the town of Philadelphia had one unusual characteristic – it was on the border of 3 regions (or countries) in the Roman Empire. In fact, the city was started kind of a missionary outpost for spreading the Greek culture and language. God wants to use this insignificant little town, to reach a *whole area* for Christ. So to a small congregation, of ordinary Christians in this crossroads of a town, God says, “I’ve got a JOB for you to do!” “I have set before you an Open Door! Now will you walk through it? Will you let Me use you in *remarkable ways*?!”

Friends, the greatest gift God can give you is not wealth, or success, or health, or power – which are things we usually look for. The greatest gift God can give you is the gift of an open door. It is the possibility to be used by God for ***eternal significance***. It’s the possibility of discovering the Eternal Purpose God has for your life. It’s the possibility of living for more than just surviving another day, or feeling enjoyment for a moment. It’s the possibility of being used by God for something *eternally lasting*. When people trust God and walk through an open door, things start to happen *beyond your ability*. You get to see God at work IN and THROUGH your life with His amazing power and goodness.

In the Bible there are many stories of people being confronted with an open door. Often people walk through them with remarkable faith in God. They leave everything familiar, they leave the comfort and the approval of others. They end up doing something so significant for God that their names are remembered through all history.

Sometimes people get to the door, and they stop and turn around. There was a rich young ruler who Jesus invited to follow Him. -- Jesus set before him an open door. But, Jesus said, it would take leaving all he depended on, leaving behind all his security, leaving behind all the wealth he trusted in. And that wealthy, powerful, young man stood by the door for a while and thought about it. And then he said “Uh-uh,” and he turned around and walked away from Jesus. He never knew what his life would have

been like if he had the faith to walk through the door. There's no tragedy like the tragedy of an *abandoned* open door.

God was speaking to this WHOLE Church in Philadelphia. He was placing an open door before the whole church.

We here are a lot like that church. But just as God had a plan and a purpose and gave an opportunity to that church long ago, God has a plan and purpose and opportunities for St. Paul Lutheran Church!

God had a plan from *eternity* to bring *YOU* here, and bring *US TOGETHER* to become *THIS* church, in *this* place, for *this* time in history. God has people in this community that He wants saved – and He wants us to be His instruments to do that.

God loves all people. God loves people so much that He gave up His only Son, Jesus, the only innocent and sinless one He gave up for sinful people like us. Would you do that? God's love is that deep that He did! The only reason that this world goes on, is that God has people He loves and gave Jesus for, that He wants brought close to Him thru the free gift of forgiveness of all sins that Jesus won by His living, dying, and rising again. God *loves* people and *wants* people saved and He's given to THIS church, in THIS place, at THIS time the privilege of sharing Jesus with them. This is HUGELY significant -- to affect peoples' eternal addresses!

God *believes* in this church, He has brought us together, He has given us amazing talents and giftedness. With His blessing and empowering, He knows He can do amazing, significant things *through* us, if we let Him! He has given His Holy Spirit to empower us. God is *GOOD* – He has placed before us an open door.

Now, God gives open doors to whole churches, and God gives open doors to each believer – to YOU! So I want to ask you: What is the door of opportunity that God is opening up for you right now? What is it?

Are you praying for open doors? When you wake up in the morning do you pray: "God open some doors. Use me in some significant way today!" "God, You own my life, so take over and lead and do with me and my life whatever You want – whatever is best"?

Are you *looking* for open doors? Are you walking through open doors with joy and faith?

I don't know what God is asking YOU to do ... but I know He's asking you to do something.

Maybe it's an open door of opportunity to somebody in your neighborhood, or at your work who needs to find out how rich and deep is God's love for him or her – and you're the one who could reach out to that person.

Maybe your open door is a ministry opportunity. Maybe it's a new job. Maybe it's a relationship. Maybe it's a risk of some growth in your family life.

What's the open door God is setting before YOU? If you don't know, the place to start is by praying – asking God to show you the door He's opened for you.

Now, one issue that is real important for door walkers is the issue of keys. And this is real good news for you – there's a wonderful promise of God here. Verse 7 says, ***“These are the words of Him ... who holds the key of David. What He opens no one can shut, and what He shuts no one can open.”*** This is an image of authority.

Now keys in those days were much, much larger than they are today. Have you ever lost your keys? Well, these keys would be real hard to lose. And kings would give the key to the palace to a very trusted servant. This very highly trusted servant would lock and unlock the door to the king's palace and thereby decide who would and who wouldn't be granted an audience with the king. It was a very important position of authority.

Today, you get around any family with someone who has just turned 16 years old, and the question of who holds the keys is an important question.

John says this promise to you: YOU KNOW who holds the keys – it's Jesus. The Christ who places before you an opened door is the Christ who holds the keys. And here's the thought behind this: !!No human being and no set of circumstances in this world can keep you from accomplishing what God asks you to do! You think about that.

Some of you are wondering, should I walk through this door? You're just one step away from a new adventure with God – And you're wondering should I *RISK* speaking to that person about faith in Jesus, or should I risk giving generously to God, or teaching, or starting a new ministry. !!Jesus holds the keys!

I don't know what God is asking you to do – but it's something. And there is not a human being on this earth, and not a set of circumstances that can keep you from accomplishing whatever mission God has for you to do!! He holds the keys.

Now, to walk through doors God has opened requires an incredible amount of trust in God. And to walk through open doors requires a LOVE for God. The only way that you'll begin a new adventure of serving Christ and living totally for Him is when you know His love personally in your heart. And to describe that deep love of God for you, there is another image of a door used. That door is mentioned in the letter to the church in Laodicea

“To the angel of the church in Laodicea write:

These are the words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the ruler of God's creation. I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! So, because you are lukewarm – neither hot nor cold – I am about to spit you out of My mouth.

In Laodicea there were these natural springs. But they weren't cold – so they weren't refreshing to drink from. They weren't hot either – like a mineral bath or a jacuzzi. They were about 95` and so the water was kind of useless – and John is using that imagery here as a picture of apathy, of spiritual indifference. This is the most dangerous of spiritual conditions – luke-warmness -- not hot, not cold. Not much passion for those lost; Not much desire for worship; Not much effort in prayer – just apathy.

Now, these marvelous words: ***Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with Me.***

To him who overcomes, I will give the right to sit with Me on My throne, just as I overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.” Revelation 3:20-22

This is a very different message than the one before. Jesus speaks about a 2nd door. This is not a door of opportunity or service to Christ. This is the door to the heart. And it was closed. Jesus stood at the door of their hearts, and the door was closed. It wasn't always like this.

There was a time when the door of their hearts was wide open to Jesus. They were *on fire*, hot, in love with Jesus. But somehow over the years, what had been a WIDE OPEN door, had become a closed door. They became luke warm, they didn't care.

When we lived in Minnesota and our girls were real little, I used to make play houses for them out of cardboard boxes from refrigerators and dryers and such. And they'd decorate them with crayons and markers, and I'd cut windows in them, and we always made a front door, and the door was real prominent.

Those houses became *their* houses – it was their place, which is real cool when you're a small child of 2, or 3, or 4 years old. And from time to time, Sue and I would go and visit. We'd stand outside and knock on their door, and they'd answer it, and invite us in. We'd have to make ourselves real small. But we'd go into *their* house – and they'd go into hostess mode, making pretend food and such.

You wonder when you love somebody – will the door always be open? Will I always be welcome in that heart? What if I knock someday and they won't answer?

And the truth is, friends, (and this is just between you and God), the time was when your heart was wide open to God ... and now it's closed. I don't know why. Maybe it's sin, maybe neglect, maybe fear, maybe busyness.

And Jesus comes to you, to this heart He made. And He does such a humble thing. He -- the King of the Universe, leaves His throne, and comes to beggars like you and me, He makes Himself real small, and He knocks. He doesn't wait for you to come to Him – He comes to you. He stands at the door and keeps knocking as a Friend, as a lover, asking entrance.

Who wouldn't HURRY to open the door for Jesus? It's the **hour of grace** when He comes!! Jesus comes to you with forgiveness for all your wrongs. He died on the cross to pay for all your sins, to make you His again. It doesn't matter what you've done or said or thought. None of us stand clean before God. None of us have lived in a way that we deserve heaven or have earned it. !!Still, Jesus comes to you – and He wants to be with you – and He offers you forgiveness and a new start. IS the door to your heart open? IS there love there between you and God as you receive and respond to this God who loves you incredibly? This is such an intimate picture – and I hope you see it.

Jesus stands at the door of YOUR heart, and He's knocking. God Himself, with His forgiveness and hope and love has come. !!! And He won't go away. He can't give up. He just stands and knocks. He loves His children too much.

Even now, right now, Jesus stands at the door – knocking, calling with His voice. You don't have to get everything perfect inside, just receive Him!

For some of you, Jesus is standing at the door of your heart. And He's asking: Won't you pour your heart out to Me in prayer as you once did?

To some of you Jesus says, "You know there's a sin inside that's a wall between you and Me – Won't you confess it? It's not bringing you any joy. !!It's killing you! It'd eroding your character. Won't you bring it into the light? Won't you repent? Won't you seek help? Won't you open the door?"

To some of you Jesus is saying, "Won't you just let go of the ceaseless frantic busyness?"

To some of you Jesus is saying, "Won't you stop being afraid? Won't you stop holding Me off at arm's length? Won't you trust Me?"

And He will come in. And He will make Himself real small. And He will sit down. And you will share rich, intimate communion with Him. BECAUSE, HE'S THE GOD OF THE OPEN DOOR!