

To The Church In Philadelphia – June 1, 2025

C.W.P. Heart Of Southland: Prayer Summit, Set Free! & Bible in a Year

- **PRAISE!** God continues to protect our camp! **PRAY** for all those still affected by MB Wildfires!
- Pray for us to grow in bringing our needs, hurts, desires & hearts to Jesus in prayer
- Pray for those trapped in anxiety, depression, addiction, bondage to be set free!
- Pray for those stuck in secret sin to have the courage to share their struggles
- Pray for us to grow in hunger for Scripture – 500 ppl to commit to BIAY within 2025!
- Pray for our church to stand firm on the truth of Scripture
- Pray for growth at Prayer Summits & Set Free! Heart transformation! 500 in attendance.

Intro: The Fathers Heart As Seen In The Seven Letters

- Recently I rewatched a clip that follows NFL Quarterback Kirk Cousins into the trophy room inside his home. The room is filled with all sorts of prizes, game-winning jerseys, and various awards which he has won throughout his football career. What struck me was how instead of talking at length about those achievements he worked so hard to attain, he chose instead to take the camera over to a shelf upon which was a handwritten note from his father, written to Kirk when he was in 8th grade. He unfolded the weathered page upon which the note was written and began to read aloud the words etched in ink which made such a profound impact on his life. As he reads them, even all those years later, you can tell they impact him still.

A Portion Of the Letter Reads: *“Kirk, your strengths are your competitive desire, your intelligence, your attitude. You’re a leader, you’re tough. You got good skills, a hard worker. You’re accurate as a passer and you got a good sense and nose for the ball.” ... “To work on,” he continued reading. “You need to be a more vocal leader. Your footwork needs to get better... Kirk, if you keep developing you could someday be an all-conference, maybe an all-state player in high school.”* **Kirk read.** The QB then instantly remembered how happy he was when he first went through the letter. ***“DAD Thinks I Can be an All-State Football Player,”*** an elated Kirk reminisced... (<https://thesportsrush.com/nfl-news-kirk-cousins-reads-aloud-an-emotional-letter-his-father-wrote-20-years-ago-dad-thinks-i-can-be-an-all-state-football-player/>)

- This highlights the power that words can have, especially words from someone who has earned a position of trust and influence in your life such as a parent, mentor, small group leader, etc.
 - o A Fathers words ought to build up, strengthen and give shape to the heart of a child.
- As we’ve made our way through these Letters to the Seven churches, I have been struck by the Fathers heart bleeding through every line of each letter; every word, every whisper or shout proceeds from the heart of the Father, from Jesus – the one who walks among the lampstands.
 - o **Remember, the WHOLE LETTER is written to The Church. ALL 22 Chapters of Revelation, written to all Seven Churches and extend beyond to all Churches and all Believers throughout time, including us! That’s important point to remember.**
- It’s significant to me that John opens this Book with Seven short letters *from Jesus* addressed to specific churches. Jesus is specific with his warnings, his admonishments, and his compliments.

Historical Context:

- This ancient city is located in modern day Turkey, and now goes by the name Alaşehir.
- Philadelphia was one of the younger cities of the Seven mentioned in Rev. 1-4. It was known for its illustrious architecture, especially its temples, earning it the nickname “little Athens”.
- Part of what made this city unique was its strategic geographical position, located along a major HWY, one of the greatest of its day, that led east, opening up possibilities to another continent.

In fact, even before it was recognized as a strategic base for Christian outreach, it was deemed as a suitable & highly effect base for which Greek language, thought & culture could spread.

- **Darrell Johnson:** *Philadelphia was founded in 140 B.C. for one over-riding purpose: to be a base from which to launch a campaign to Hellenize (make Greek) the world —to be a base from which to spread the Greek language, worldview and way of life to the whole world.* (Discipleship On The Edge: An Expository Journey Through The Book Of Revelation)
- Lastly, Philadelphia was located right on the edge of an active volcano area. Again, as Johnson points out, this was both a blessing and a curse. A blessing because the volcanic activity resulted in fertile soil conditions and access to hot springs. A curse because the citizens lived with an almost constant fear that at any moment they may experience a devastating earthquake.
 - o For this reason, many citizens of Philadelphia would evacuate the city at even the slightest tremor. In fact, one source I read suggested that some people may have chosen to withdrawn from the city each night, returning only in the daylight.
- **Why Is Historical Context Noteworthy?**
 - o When we look at historical records and archaeological remains of these cities, aspects of the letter begin to *come alive*! This points to the brilliance & intentionality of Jesus.
 - o When Jesus addressed a church he wasn't vague or shallow. In fact, quite the opposite! Without getting to far ahead of myself, take for example **Verse 12:** *“The one who is victorious I will make a pillar in the temple of my God. Never again will they leave it.”*
 - o As mentioned, we know that Philadelphia often experienced earthquakes. For this reason, they built MASSIVE pillars in their city that went deep into the earth. Yet even so, when the tremors hit many people would take flight and leave the city at once. **Do you see what Jesus is saying to this church?** He is saying, *“Life in the kingdom of this world is fragile at best... even your best efforts can't withstand the shaking. But I will make you a PILLAR. Never AGAIN will you have to flee – you will be safe in my Kingdom!”*

A | BEHOLD The Author

This letter contains several amazing encouragements & promises which we will now look together shortly. In fact, **no corrections or rebukes** are included in this letter! But first, a note about the author.

Jesus begins: *“These are the words of him who is holy and true, who holds the key of David.”*

- In each letter, Jesus reveals an aspect(s) of His Divine identity to the Church in which he addresses. This aligns with the stated purpose of Revelation as seen in the opening line of Chapter 1: *“The Revelation of Jesus Christ..”* (Revelation 1:1, NASB)

- Revelation is intended to reveal Jesus (*His character, Identity, Attributes*) to His servants (i.e. The Church), not only to tell us about future events. In fact, while it certainly *DOES* provide an account of events to come, even those events are part of the revealing of WHO Jesus is.
- **P. Stefan has reminded us many times many times throughout the series that Revelation contains the fullest Gospel presentation – it's the REVEALING of Jesus Christ to the Church!**

Revelation repeatably provides stunning descriptions of who Jesus is (His Identity), which link into the beautiful tapestry of the Old Testament (and N.T.) Scriptures. In the case of our teaching text for this morning, Jesus reveals himself as **He who is HOLY and TRUE; He who holds the key of David.**

- **What Can We Learn From This?**
 - **HOLY**: the word used is 'hagios' (Strong's G40), which is the same word used to describe The Lord God Almighty in **Rev. 4:8**, *"⁸...the four living creatures... do not cease to say, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God, the Almighty, who was and who is and who is to come."*
 - *"The holy one" elsewhere in the Revelation is a title attributed to God (4:8; 6:10), but it was a common designation of the Lord's Messiah (Mark 1:24; Luke 4:34; John 6:69; 1 John 2:20)... (Ladd, A Commentary On The Revelation Of John)*
 - The word Holy means "set apart". **Jesus is revealing Himself as DISTINCT & DIVINE.** He is "set apart". He is **WHOLE & COMPLETE**, akin to the Father. He is **God IN FLESH**.
 - While we enjoy the wonderful promise of becoming *Children of God* (Jn 1:12), Jesus is the ***"one and only Son of God"*** as John put it (Jn. 3:16) throughout his Gospel.
 - **TRUE**: the word used is 'alethinos' (Strong's G227), which is the same word used to describe The Lord throughout the New Testament, including **Revelation 6:10**, *¹⁰They (the martyrs) called out in a loud voice, "How long, Sovereign Lord, HOLY and TRUE, until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?"*
 - **TRUE > 'alethinos'**, means: *That which has not only the name and resemblance (of truth), but the real nature corresponding to the name, in every respect corresponding to the idea signified by the name, real, true & genuine...* (Interlinear: Blue Letter Bible)
 - In simple terms, Jesus is revealing himself **AS TRUTH**. Beyond saying that his words are true, he claims of himself to be **REALITY** in the truest sense (ref. John 14:6).
 - Jesus includes one more qualifier... He *"who holds the key of David"*. We will return to this in a moment, as it relates to the open door set before them. **But first...**
- **Why Is This Important? ...BECAUSE JESUS HAS THE RIGHT TO WRITE TO THE CHURCH.**
 - **Who a letter is from dictates how much weight it carries, isn't it true?**
 - **THE LETTER WAS SPECIAL TO HIM BECAUSE OF WHO WROTE IT.**
- Likewise, this letter written to the Philadelphian Church (all the other letters too) is special because of who wrote it. This is JESUS – **HOLY & TRUE**. **He has the *right to write to them & say these words*. They are not *empty words*. They drip with divine authority.**
 - **Church, we ought to get our eyes on JESUS more often.** Isn't it often true that we are tempted to brush pass the titles Jesus gives in the letters in a hurry to get to the "good stuff"? We want the practical – *"Yeah, yeah. Holy & True. Got it. Now get to the part that applies to me and my life and my problems. Give me the promises!!"* How sad. Due to our self-centeredness we miss the point. Jesus is not a means to an end – He is the end **AND** the means of getting there.
 - **Church: BEHOLD THE AUTHOR!** The fact that He chose to write to us... to this "little church" in Philly... it's staggering. Yet, behold the Father's Heart. He wrote to us!

- Likewise... **OBEY THE AUTHOR!** Scripture does not contain 'suggestions', but rather, commands. Jesus has the right to give us commands. We should listen!
- The promises Jesus is about to make are incredible. It's imperative we know that these words are BACKED UP & VALIDATED because they proceed as royal proclamations from King Jesus. **Let's unpack them, shall we? What is this *Open-Door* set before them?**

B | An Open Door *Before* You

⁸ *I know your deeds. See, I have placed before you an open door that no one can shut.* Rev. 3:8

- Have you ever been locked out? That's a terrible feeling.
- Jesus says, "*See, I have placed before you an open door...*" (v7). The door *is* open. Access *has been* granted. All that remains is the choice to walk through the door *BEFORE* you.
- **What is this *Open Door* set before them?** Again, I'll draw from Darrell Johnson's work on this point. It'd be fair to say that there are two compelling ways to understand this 'Open Door'...
 - **The first would be "the door of Salvation".**
 - **The second would be "a door of Opportunity".**
 - ***So which is it?*** I would suggest **BOTH**. As is often the case, we detect BOTH/AND at work.

The Door Of Salvation: Going back to the qualifier in Jesus' introduction regarding the keys in His hand: Jesus said he "*holds the key of David...*". Keys open doors, right? This is a reference to Isaiah 22.

- "*In that day I will summon my servant, Eliakim son of Hilkiah. I will clothe him with your robe and fasten your sash around him and hand your authority over to him. He will be a father to those who live in Jerusalem and to the people of Judah. I will place on his shoulder the key to the house of David; what he opens no one can shut, and what he shuts no one can open. I will drive him like a peg into a firm place; he will become a seat of honor for the house of his father. All the glory of his family will hang on him...*" Isaiah 22:20-24 (NIV)
 - This promise found *partial* fulfillment in Eliakim, a faithful palace administrator to Hezekiah, king of Judah. Isaiah 22 prophesies about Eliakim, who is being compared to another palace administrator who immediately preceded him; a man named Shebna.
 - Shebna was proud, arrogant and self-serving; thus the Lord condemned him and removed him from his "lofty" position of power, replacing him with Eliakim.
 - The Lord gave Eliakim the "keys" to the house of David, meaning he was able to carry out the responsibilities of his position while backed by the full power, blessing & authority of David's House (including all the Covenant Promises made to it).
 - **For sake of time, I will jump right to the main point: THIS PROPHECY FINDS ITS ULTIMATE FULFILLMENT IN JESUS, THE PROMISED MESSIAH.** Jesus rules from David's throne with ALL AUTHORITY. He wants the church to know that he is the Servant of The Lord (a common title in Isaiah), and that he holds the key of David along with all their power, blessing & authority based on the Covenant Promises of God which He fulfilled.
- Furthermore, these keys also mentioned in **Revelation 1:18**, "*I am the Living One; I was dead, and now look, I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades.*"
 - All of this to say, Jesus sets a door of Salvation before us through which we may enter into a covenant relationship with Him and have Eternal Life within His Kingdom.

A Door Of Opportunity: Here's where things get really exciting. *"More exciting than Salvation?! How so?"* Because there's more to the story! **Here's The Big Truth:** Jesus offers more than **forgiveness FROM** our sins; he offers us **freedom FOR** a new purpose! **(Made For More)**

- **Let me show you an example:** Think of the Apostle Paul, formerly known as Saul who persecuted the Church. He was zealous to the point of violence in his fight against the church. But everything changed when he encountered the Risen Lord on the road to Damascus (Acts 9).
- **The Lord is SO GREAT & rich in mercy; he is able to save even the worst sinners!** That's how Paul described himself (1 Tim. 1:15-16). Jesus set before Paul a door of Salvation!!
 - But that's not all he did... he didn't just save Paul from his sins (as amazing as that already was). Jesus set Paul on a new path with a new purpose, to build the church!
- **The specific phrase "an open door" is used elsewhere in the New Testament in relation to an opportunity for effective Kingdom work, especially in reference to Paul's mission.**
 - *On arriving there, they gathered the church together and reported all that God had done through them and how he had **opened a door of faith** to the Gentiles. Acts 14:27 (NIV)*
 - *⁸ But I will stay on at Ephesus until Pentecost, ⁹ because **a great door for effective work has opened to me**, and there are many who oppose me. 1 Corinthians 16:9 (NIV)*
 - *And pray for us, too, **that God may open a door for our message**, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ, for which I am in chains. Colossians 4:3 (NIV)*

Jesus is saying to the Philadelphian Church in Revelation 3:8, "I have set an OPPORTUNITY before you which can't be closed! I've made you for more. Go through the door!"

- With an offer like this from Jesus himself, can we agree that this is not the time to sit idly by? This is the time to rise up and walk through the door!
- **Church, might it be that the Lord has set before us (Southland & The Church) an Open Door as well?** Has the Lord not provided **YOU** with an Open Door(s) for effective Kingdom work? Jesus said, "What I've opened, no one can shut!". He who promised is Faithful!
 - **What are we waiting for??** The only thing stopping us is... ourselves. Philadelphia was given an opportunity, as have we. How are we using it?

Remember how we talked about Philadelphia's strategic location along a major HWY?

- Darrell Johnson: *Here is where we really see the brilliance of Jesus... So Sir William Ramsey wrote: "Philadelphia was a missionary city from the beginning." A missionary city for everything Greek! "I have set before you an open door." From now on the city would be a base for the launching of a new campaign, the campaign to gospelize the world It would now be a missionary city for the kingdom of Jesus Christ. (Discipleship On The Edge: An Expository Journey Through The Book Of Revelation)*
- **QUESTION: WHERE HAS GOD STRATEGICALLY POSITIONED **YOU**? (where's your field?)**
 - Are you willing to let your life, your position, your influence, your time, skills and abilities be a link between God's Kingdom and the unreached world?
- **Some Passages come to mind...**
 - *¹⁵ Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, ¹⁶ **making the most of every opportunity**, because the days are evil. ¹⁷ Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is. Ephesians 5:15-17 (NIV)*

- *⁵ Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; **make the most of every opportunity.** ⁶ Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone. Colossians 4:5-6 (NIV)*
- Interesting how Paul links **WISDOM** with making the most of every opportunity. Here's why I think that is: because wisdom is the next step beyond knowledge. Knowledge is knowing WHAT to do. Wisdom is knowing HOW & WHEN to do something. We need WISDOM, which I would argue only comes from walking in step with the Holy Spirit.
 - **We are in a crisis of Discipleship.** Jesus' return gets closer every day, and we need to be about the mission: **Be Disciples, Make Disciples.** We aren't going to get there with more informational talks or more books. We need boots on the ground disciples ready to get up and walk through the door set before us.
- **Things that keep us from going through the door:**
 - **Fear** – what if it's dangerous? Costly? Uncomfortable? What if I fail?
 - **Complacency** – if I'm honest, it sounds like a lot of work... I'll get to it later.
 - **Distraction** – often times we miss **this opportunity** waiting for **that opportunity**
 - **Division** – when we are too busy fighting with one another, the devil wins!
 - **Pride** – our heads are too big, we can't get through the door
 - **Hardships** – “open door for effective work” **doesn't mean no challenges!**
 - **Remember:** 1 Corinthians 16:9. Opportunity and Hardship will often coincide!

C | HE KNOWS Your Deeds & Little Strength

*⁸ **I know your deeds.** See, I have placed before you an open door that no one can shut. **I know that you have little strength,** yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name. Revelation 3:8 (NIV)*

- I often take comfort in the thought that because Jesus is all-knowing... **HE ALREADY KNOWS.** This seems obvious, but the reminder is surprisingly useful.
 - I've got a big problem and I really need help!!! ... **HE ALREADY KNOWS.**
 - I've got big needs and I really need provision!!! ... **HE ALREADY KNOWS.**
 - I'm scared about the future; will it all work out?? ... **HE ALREADY KNOWS.**
- **HE ALREADY KNOWS!** What does this letter to the Philadelphians teach us? Two additional things that God already knows:
 - ***"I know your deeds."*** We don't need to spend time reminding God of our achievements and accolades (or lack-there-of) in hopes of gaining favour or good standing with him...
 - **HE ALREADY KNOWS.** Just said this exact line in almost all of His letters. No need to hide our bad deeds, rather repent. No need to flaunt our good deeds, rather praise!
 - When you know that God already knows, you are free to not need others to know!
 - ***"I know that you have little strength..."*** We don't need to spend time reminding God of all of our weaknesses and shortcomings in order to inform him on why we shouldn't be used to build his Kingdom... That's exactly what Moses did. *"I can't this... I can't that..."*
 - **Trust me... HE ALREADY KNOWS!!**
 - **HE ALREADY KNOWS, and yet he desires to use us!!**
- **First,** Jesus encourages the church by acknowledging that He has seen their deeds. Again, no rebuke or correction. He shares this to encourage them!! *"Good job!"*

- **Second**, Jesus acknowledges something about the Philadelphian church that would seem to some like an insult, but in fact should be seen as a COMPLIMENT! **"...you have little strength..."** This means they are primed and ready to succeed in the Kingdom of God!
- *⁷... Therefore, in order to keep me from becoming conceited, I was given a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. ⁸ Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. ⁹ But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. ¹⁰ That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. **For when I am weak, then I am strong.** 2 Cor. 12:7-10*
 - o When you understand your "little strength" as an advantage which allows God to exercise His Great strength through you, you can joyfully say **"Here I am; SEND ME!"**

The church in Philadelphia had already faced many trials, and more were still to come. And in all this, Jesus knew they had "little power" (3:8). Isn't that encouraging?

- **One more time...** Darrel Johnson writes: *The church before which Jesus set an open door of opportunity in and of itself lacked the resources to overcome the obstacles. That is the way it should be, for as we saw again in the message to Sardis, the Christian life cannot be lived apart from Christ. Without him we have "little power." And he is always calling the church into mission beyond our resources so that we have to depend on him.*
 - o **Stop arguing with God that you aren't qualified because of your 'little strength'.**

D | Hold On – I Am Coming Soon!

*¹⁰ Since you have kept my command to endure patiently, I will also keep you from the hour of trial that is going to come on the whole world to test the inhabitants of the earth. ¹¹ **I am coming soon.** Hold on to what you have, so that no one will take your crown. Rev. 3:10-11 (NIV)*

- Now we come to the last promise that we will cover this morning – we end with a call for patient endurance. This theme is seen throughout Revelation (Rev. 1:9, 6:11, 12:17, 14:12)

I want to call your attention back to a point I made earlier: Remember, this WHOLE LETTER (i.e. Revelation) is written to The Church. ALL 22 Chapters of Revelation, written to all Seven Churches and extend beyond to all Churches and all Believers throughout time, including us!

- I restate this because there are some who would argue that verse 10 is saying that Jesus is going to remove/rapture His Church from the Tribulation. We do not believe this to be what Jesus is saying to this church, nor to The Church.
 - o In fact, verse 10 is the link between this letter and the rest of the book of Revelation, which is written for The Church (including but not limited to Philadelphia)!
 - o Jesus is again reminding this church (and The Church) that he is the one who will KEEP THEM. He will PROTECT them. He has PRESERVED them through tribulations, and will PRESERVE them again, including in The Great Tribulation to come!
 - For more on this, see the "Things To Come Conference" resources on our church website! <https://mysouthland.com/equipping-conference/>
 - o **Remember the words of Jesus' High Priestly Prayer:** *My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one.* John 17:15 (NIV)

- Joel Richardson uses a wonderful analogy of canning/preserving food to illustrate this point. You will not waste away or rot. You will be preserved!
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NCqxm4R4_s
- **It is for this reason Jesus immediately goes on to say - *I am coming soon. HOLD ON to what you have, so that no one will take your crown.* Rev. 3:11 (NIV)**

Are you facing a trial or tribulation today? Jesus says to you, “**HOLD ON – I Am Coming Soon!**”

- Evil has an expiry date!
- Suffering has an expiry date!
- Jesus is coming soon, and He will wipe away every tear and right every wrong!

Remember, this is a promise to those of ‘little strength’. Our hope is not in ourselves, but in Him! He is your anchor in the storm. Your strength when you are weak. I conclude with the words on John from a few chapters further:

This calls for patient endurance on the part of the people of God who keep his commands and remain faithful to Jesus. Revelation 14:12 (NIV)

Maranatha!