



Westminster
Presbyterian Church
NACOGDOCHES, TEXAS

The Letter to the Church at Philadelphia Revelation 3:7-13

Those who saw the movie *Chariots of Fire* know part of Eric Liddell's story. He was one of Britain's greatest athletes. Liddell's family was Scottish and they served Christ as missionaries to China where Eric was born.

Maybe you remember from the movie that Eric Liddell's goal in life was to honor God, and living for Christ was a way of life for him. He understood that Sunday was the Christian Sabbath, and on his way to the Paris Olympics he withdrew from the 100 meter race when he found out that he would have to run on Sunday. He withdrew even though he was favored to win the gold. He told his coaches, "I'm not running on the Lord's Day."

Of course, things worked out well for Britain. Harold Abraham, a Jewish runner on the team, won the gold medal for Britain, setting an Olympic record. Liddell was able to run in the four hundred meter race. As he was warming up for finals in the four hundred, the silver medalist in the 100 meter race, Jackson Shultz from the United States, slipped a little piece of paper into Liddell's hand. Eric Liddell opened it and found written out the text from First Samuel 2:30: "**Them that honor me I will honor.**" Minutes later Eric Liddell won the gold medal in the four hundred meter in world record time.

Following the 1924 Olympics Eric Liddell moved to China as a missionary. When World War Two broke out and the Japanese occupied China, Liddell was placed in an internment camp. In the camp, Eric became a leader and he helped keep things organized. Food, medicines, and other supplies ran short at the camp. There were many cliques in the camp and when some rich businessmen managed to smuggle in some eggs, Liddell shamed them into sharing the eggs with everyone. Eric kept himself busy by

helping the elderly, teaching Bible classes, arranging games for children and teaching the children science. He was known to the children as Uncle Eric.

Norman Cliff, who survived the experience, wrote a book about the internment camp and in it he stated that Liddell was "the finest Christian gentleman it has been my pleasure to meet. In all the time in the camp, I never heard him say a bad word about anybody."

Shortly before the 2008 Beijing Olympics Chinese authorities revealed that Liddell had given up an opportunity to leave the camp and instead gave his place to a pregnant woman. Apparently, the Japanese made a deal with the British for a prisoner exchange. Eric Liddell died of a brain tumor on February 21, 1945, five months before what would have been his liberation.

As I preach today's sermon keep in mind that note passed to him by Jackson Shultz before Liddell ran the 400 meter race, "**Them that honor me I will honor.**"

Today we are looking at the letter written to the church in Philadelphia.

Philadelphia was a frontier town 28 miles southeast of Sardis. Of all the churches that received letters in Revelation 2 and 3, maybe the Philadelphia church and was the one that was slipped a piece of paper with the words from First Samuel, "**Them that honor me I will honor.**" This small church was one that honored the Lord in all it did. Philadelphia was one of the two churches in our list of seven that had nothing negative written about it.

Hear the Word of God as I read from Revelation 3:7-13, the Letter to the church at Philadelphia: ⁷**And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write: These are the words of the holy one, the true one, who has the key of David, who opens and no one will shut, who shuts and no one opens:**

⁸**I know your works. Look, I have set before you an open door, which no one is able to shut. I know that you have but little power, and yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name.** ⁹**I will make those of**

the synagogue of Satan who say that they are Jews and are not, but are lying—I will make them come and bow down before your feet, and they will learn that I have loved you. ¹⁰Because you have kept my word of patient endurance, I will keep you from the hour of trial that is coming on the whole world to test the inhabitants of the earth. ¹¹I am coming soon; hold fast to what you have, so that no one may seize your crown. ¹²If you conquer, I will make you a pillar in the temple of my God; you will never go out of it. I will write on you the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem that comes down from my God out of heaven, and my own new name. ¹³Let anyone who has an ear listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches.”

As with the other letters, or for that matter the entire book of Revelation, this passage is rich with imagery that comes from its historical setting.

It begins by referring to our Lord as: **“The holy one, the true one, who has the key of David, who opens and no one will shut, who shuts and no one opens.”**

Calling Christ the “true one” is instructive. The word “true” here is not the Greek word for a true statement, but it means real and genuine. Jesus was and is the only one who is truly God and truly man. Of course, people are not divine, as Jesus is; but have you ever thought of the implications that only Jesus was a true human? This is a confession that except for Adam and Eve before the fall, only in Jesus you can see what God had in mind when he created human beings. We are sinful, and we fall short of what it means to be men and women as God created us to be, but Jesus reflects a humanity as God intended.

Jesus is the holy and true one, and he holds the key of David. Like the top steward to the king, no one can open the door to the king’s chambers without the permission of the steward. Jesus is the one who has the keys to open the way into the Kingdom of God, and to whom he opens the door, no

one is able to shut them out, and to whom the door is shut, no one can open it for them.

Philadelphia was a border town. On our modern maps, you can find Philadelphia in Turkey, almost in the center, except a little to the west. To the east of Philadelphia lay Phrygia. Philadelphia was where Greek civilization ended and where barbarianism began. As a matter of fact, the region was divided in two. To the west was the Hellenistic world and to the east was the Asian and Oriental world.

Philadelphia was the gateway to the east, like St. Louis is the gateway to the west and Nacogdoches is the gateway to Texas. One of the hopes of the Roman Empire was that Philadelphia would, in a sense, be a missionary town used to convert the lands to the east to Hellenism. The Roman attempts to Hellenize the lands east of Philadelphia were unsuccessful, but notice a line in verse eight of our text: **“I know your works. Look, I have set before you an open door, which no one is able to shut.”**

Christians in Philadelphia would have recognized the imagery. Their city was built as a door to the east, but it appeared that it was a shut door for the east or the Orient was never converted to Hellenism. But Christ has opened the door for the Gospel to be spread into east from the church in Philadelphia.

Philadelphia was often shaken by earthquakes. In A.D. 17 the town was devastated by an earthquake. In order to rebuild the town, the emperor Tiberius remitted taxes from the people for several years, plus gave generously to help rebuild the city and the lives of its citizens.

I have never experienced a severe earthquake. I remember our house shook ever so slightly couple of times a few years back when there was an earthquake out in Timpson. It was a little disconcerting to have an earthquake in East Texas, but fortunately they were not bad. I did not feel it, but I understand there was another small quake last week.

If there is a powerful earthquake I understand I should get out of the building as quickly as I can. Well, in Philadelphia there was a lot of going out during the earthquakes then coming back in to take care of the damage.

Notice in verse twelve: **If you conquer, I will make you a pillar in the temple of my God; you will never go out of it.”**

In other words, in God’s presence there is safety. The ground is unshakeable. Thus in God’s temple you never have to run out. In this verse Jesus is saying, “I can rid you of your fears, your terrors and your uncertainties. I can give you that which will keep you safe in life and in death.

I know people who are afraid to die, but Jesus overcomes our fear of death, and if Jesus does not come soon, we will all be caught in the inevitability of death, but we don’t fear it, for in death Jesus is there.

Well, that is the basic thrust of this letter, and today I want to concentrate on the verse that speaks of the door that Christ has opened for the church that no one can close. It is the door that is opened for the evangelization of those living in fear. It is the same door that is open right here to our neighbors. Whether they be as close as next door or in Romanian orphanages, or children in Haiti, the co-worker at the office, or whether they be our neighbors here in Nacogdoches, we are called to share Christ with them.

We are called to open the door of the Kingdom of God by declaring the glory of God in our lives. We are to declare God’s glory by what we say and by what we do.

Chuck Swindoll, on a trip to Boston, said, “It is my opinion that the best evangelistic center in greater metropolitan Boston is not a church. It is a filling station in Arlington. It was owned and operated by a man named Bob who caught the vision early in life that his vocation and his calling were to be welded together. As time passed, his station became known as the place to go for gas, new tires, or other car service. I have seen a half dozen cars lined up

bumper to bumper near two pumps in front of that little station just waiting to be served by Bob. He has no banner out, no “Jesus saves” flags, no signs, no “ichthuses,” nothing plastered all over his window, no cute slogans, “Bring your car to Bob and take your soul to Jesus.” He simply did his job! He did it well and people knew he was in partnership with the Lord. He led dozens of people to faith in Jesus Christ by what he said and by what he did.

Bob’s story begs us to ask how we go about our job at the office, or at the plant, or on the street. Do we live with Christian integrity? Can people see Jesus in us and know our witness without a sign plastered on the back of our shirt? Do you simply love people, work for their best interest, always ready to express to others something about the hope which is in you?

“Them that honor me I will honor” are words that meant so much to Eric Liddell, and words that describe this little church in Philadelphia. Oh, how I hope and pray we will be a church that honors God and understands the blessing of being honored by God. May a pillar be erected in our name in the Temple of God.

The door is open and no one can close it. God will bless our witness. So this week, I hope every one of us will tell someone else about Jesus. Don’t use words every time; let them see Jesus in your life. But don’t refrain from words. I hope each member of this church will have the opportunity to tell someone this week about your faith in Christ, with the prayer that they too will look to Christ for help in their times of need, and want to honor him in both good times and bad.

The door was open to the Philadelphia church to take the gospel eastward into the Orient. The door was open for Eric Liddell to take the gospel to China, and now the door is open for us to take the gospel to Nacogdoches. Don’t stay on this side of the door, go out and declare the glory of God. And he will honor you. I don’t know if that means God will erect a pillar with your name on it in his temple, but he will honor you, and what

greater thing can you receive in all creation? **“Them that honor me I will honor.”** Amen.