

When was the last time you heard a sermon from the Book of Revelation? When was the last time that you read the Book of Revelation? Now I did quote a verse from Revelation two weeks ago. The Book of Revelation has fascinated scholars for years, but it is not read much in church and is not studied much by Christians. However, in recent years there has been an increased interest in this book and the end of time.

A Bible Study group was discussing the end of time. The discussion got around to death and the teacher asked the class what they would do if they knew they only had four days to live. One man said that he would go out and spread the Good News of the gospel to everybody he could. The teacher commended his decision. A woman said that she would give all her wealth to those in need, to which the teacher praised her. Finally one man in the back said that he would go stay with his mother-in-law. The teacher asked why he would visit his mother-in-law? To which he replied that it would be the longest four days of his life.

Having led several studies on the Book of Revelation, I have found it to be quite insightful and challenging to study. One of the misconceptions about the Book of Revelation is that while it forecasts the future and the end of the world, there are no lessons or advice for living the Christian life. But this is definitely not true; the Book of Revelation is full of practical advice that can be applied to our daily lives. This is especially true in the second and third chapters where Jesus writes a personal letter to each of the seven churches in Asia Minor. This morning, let's look at what Jesus has to say to the church at Philadelphia and see what we can learn and apply to our walk with the Lord. I will be reading from the third chapter, verses 7 through 13.

Read Revelation 3:7-13

So what insights can we gain from this letter to the church at Philadelphia? Well, let's start with the meaning of its name. Philadelphia is Greek for "one who loves his brother." Of all the seven churches, Philadelphia receives the highest praise from Jesus Christ and is the only one of the seven churches that does not receive any criticism. Jesus tells the church: "I know your deeds; I see what you have done." Notice that Jesus did not say: "I hear what you say you are going to do." He said I know, I see, what you have done. We as individuals and as a church are judged not by what we say we are going to do, but by what we actually do, by our actions. It is a known fact that most people will judge you by your actions, not your intentions. You may have a heart of gold, but so does a hard-boiled egg. No one builds a good reputation on what he or she says they are going to do tomorrow. All talk and no action gets you nowhere.

Then Jesus goes on and tells the church at Philadelphia: "You don't have much strength. I know that; you used what you had to keep my Word. You didn't deny me when times were rough." Even though this particular church was small and had limited resources, it remained faithful to

its calling. When things got tough, they never forgot the Great Commission and kept spreading the gospel. Here is both encouragement and expectation for all of God's churches, no matter their size or their budget. All things are possible when we remain faithful and focus on Jesus and what He is calling us to do.

In verse 11, Jesus goes on to tell them to hold on to what they have so that no one will take away their eternal reward. The *Message* paraphrases this verse like this: "Keep a tight grip on what you have so no one distracts you and steals your crown." In other words, keep on doing what you are currently doing, stay focused on me. Don't get distracted by the values of this world and its selfish agenda. Be careful so that no one pushes their own personal agenda in search of selfish glory and divert your eyes from the real purpose of life, which is service to your Lord and Savior. If you do, then your task, your purpose, and your mission will be given to someone else who has the desire and faith to follow Christ and not the world.

Now comes the key point in our text that I want to focus on in the time that we have remaining, verse 8: "See, I have placed before you an open door that no one can shut." I call this the Door of Opportunity that is placed before each church and every Christian - the opportunity of service in the name of the Lord; to love our neighbors as ourselves; the opportunity to fulfill the call of the Great Commission – to make disciples, to baptize and to teach.

Jesus says that He has opened a door for us; a door of opportunity for each one of us as individuals and as the church to fulfill His purpose for our lives and the church. During His ministry here on earth, Jesus gave specific commands to His followers on what was expected of them – their purpose. Of course the command that is most often cited by preachers, and in some cases the one most often ignored is the Great Commission found in Matthew 28:19-20 – "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you."

The Apostle John's version of this charge is found in John 20:21 – "As the Father has sent me, I am sending you." Did you catch that? We are not the sender, but the ones sent. Here, and at Pentecost, the believers received the indwelling of the Holy Spirit to guide and direct them. With the help of the Spirit we are to be Christ's presence in the world – His hands and feet; we are to be the face of Jesus to those in need and those searching for the Light of the World.

Jesus also told us in John 13:34-35 that "we are to love one another as He loves us, by this others will know that we are His followers." When asked who is our neighbor, Jesus clearly demonstrated in the Parable of the Good Samaritan that everybody, especially those in need are our neighbors, whether they live next door, across the street, in another state or across the ocean. This is affirmed in the Parable of the Sheep and Goats that Keith/Ron read to us earlier

from the 25<sup>th</sup> chapter of the Gospel of Matthew. Jesus taught that self-giving care for others was at the heart of God's will for each of us. He clearly states that we will be judged by how we respond to those in need. Do we stay in our cozy comfort zone and safe sanctuaries or do we go into the world and reach out in love?

As Christians we are to reflect agape love in our lives and our ministry, the love that seeks the best for others no matter what. When the well-being of another person is as important to us as our own well-being, then we are demonstrating agape love. Throughout His ministry here on earth, Jesus demonstrated agape love in His interactions with others, and He expects us to do the same today.

As Christians and as a church we are called to be Jesus' agents for the transformation of the world one person at a time. We are to bear witness for God in a world that is desperately in need of the truth and help. In the Lord's Prayer, we pray: "Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." Through the transformation of the world, one person at a time, we build God's kingdom, a kingdom of love, justice, and mercy where everybody knows and loves God, and cares for one another. This transformation is our purpose, our calling and our mission. It is our door of opportunity.

Thus the Church is called to missions. There is no mission apart from God, and there is no church without missions. We are called to be the hands and feet of God, His faithful workers. Missions was throbbing in the heart of God when He sent His Son Jesus Christ to die for the world. As someone once said, "Missions didn't begin with the Great Commission. It began with 'God so loved the world that He sent His only Begotten Son.'"

Missions is one of the lifelines of the church; it is so critical that failure to practice it in some form results in the deterioration of the church's vitality and ability to make disciples for Jesus Christ. Missions and outreach are what drives the life and energy of a church. When churches turn inward, using all their resources for their own survival and caring only for their own people, then the spiritual life of the church disappears, and it will soon die.

One hot day, Herman Trueblood, all clean and cooled off by a nice swim in the ocean, saw a sweating man and his two sons trying to push their disabled car up an incline. Immediately, two voices started debating in Herman's head. One said: "Here is an opportunity for service; you ought to help them push." But the other voice protested: "Now this is none of your business. You will just get yourself hot and dirty. Let them handle their own problems." He finally yielded to his better judgment and put his shoulder to the task of helping the man and his sons move their car.

Then something happened which Herman never forgot. The father extended his hand, and said: "I am very glad that you came along. You had just enough strength, added to ours, to

make the car go.” Years later Herman said that he could still hear the father saying: “You had just enough strength, added to ours, to make the car go.” There are thousands of people struggling to get some heavy load over a hill, and we as a church probably have “just enough strength, added to theirs, to make things happen.”

The words of Jesus to the church at Philadelphia are also addressed to High Desert United Methodist Church: “I know your deeds. See, I have placed before you an open door that no one can shut.” He has given us a door of opportunity right here in Rio Rancho to make a difference in the lives of this community for Him. This door leads to joining the community outreach being established at the Felician Sisters Convent next door, to supporting of the Meadowlark Methodist Food Pantry, to starting weekly worship services at MorningStar, to feeding the homeless at the Community of Hope in downtown Albuquerque, to providing sack lunches for homeless in the International Zone, to helping other churches like University Heights, and now to supporting Feed New Mexico Kids and ensuring that no child goes hungry over the weekend.

Now some of you may be thinking right now, there’s only so much we can do. After all we are not a large church and we have some age on us. Yes, but remember that Moses was 80 years old when God called him and nothing is impossible for God. We must take advantage of each door of opportunity that God opens for us. Do you remember what I read earlier from verse 8: “See, I have placed before you an open door that no one can shut.” I hope that you didn’t miss those last few words: “that no one can shut.” In other words if God wants something done, nothing is going to stop it – not the size of the church, not doubts, not financial restraints, not resistance – nothing. Remember what 1 Corinthians 2:9 states: “No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love Him.” Nothing is impossible for God as long as we walk in faith and stay focused on Him and what He wants us to do.

I hope and pray that it is the desire of each one of us to make a difference in this world, to leave it better off than we found it. Let me close with a statement from John Wesley which sums up what we are called to do not only as Methodists, but as Christians as well: “Do all you can, by all the means you can, in all the ways you can, in all the places you can, at all the times you can, to all the people you can, as long as you can.” May we be faithful to this charge and respond as did the prophet Isaiah centuries ago when God asked: “Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?” And Isaiah didn’t hesitate in saying: “Here I am! Send me.” May we as a church and as individuals respond with the same enthusiasm to the doors of opportunity that God is opening up to us. Amen