

**Text: Revelation 3:7-13 (Pew Bible, pg.1217)**

**Title: “No Limits”**

## **INTRODUCTION**

**ILLUSTRATION** – Last Tuesday morning in our 6:30 prayer time one of our men prayed something that really struck a chord with me. He said, “God, I get it now; now what I am going to do with it.” As we move through these days of discovery about God and about ourselves, it’s not just information. It’s truth that God wants to use in changing the direction of our lives.

Let’s open our Bibles to Revelation 3:7 ... Jesus’ letter to the church in the ancient city of Philadelphia ... not the home to the Eagles and the Philly’s and Rocky Balboa, but the ancient city in present day Turkey. As we approach our 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary as a church, we need to hear what Jesus has to say to each of these churches as He calls each of them to radical faithfulness. Read Revelation 3:7-13.

Historians tell us that the ancient city of Philadelphia was a strategic city. It was established to spread Greek culture throughout that region. Its location made it an open door to many parts. You’ll see why that’s important in a moment.

And in the heart of this city was a church for which Jesus has the highest regard. He had no complaint against the church. Instead he affirms them:

**Revelation 3:8 - I know your deeds.**

Their deeds were the good works they are doing in the name of Christ.

**Revelation 3:8b - I know that you have little strength...**

When Jesus said that they had “little strength,” He’s talking about human strength that might be manifested in the size or the wealth or the power of the church in the city. Jesus is pleased that this church is radically faithful, in spite of the fact that they have none of the things that humans typically use to measure the greatness of the church.

You see it’s one thing to be impressive in the eyes of the world. It’s another thing to be impressive in the eyes of God. Which do we want more?

**Zechariah 4:6 – “Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit,” says the LORD Almighty.”**

The greatness of a church is not determined by size or wealth or power. It is determined by the work of the Holy Spirit in that church. And the greatness of a believer has nothing to do with how talented you are. It has nothing to do with your ability, but with your availability to be used by the Holy Spirit.

**Revelation 3:8c - Yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name.**

The wording here seems to indicate that there was a time, a particular occasion, when the church was called upon to stand up against opposition ... to keep the Word of Christ and not deny His name. We're talking here about severe persecution that probably came from the militant Jewish population that Jesus calls in v.9 "the synagogue of Satan."

So what is the motivation for this kind of radical faithfulness? What drove believers to face incredible pressure and to remain true to Christ? It all has to do with their vision of Christ. It's the same vision that will inspire us and motivate us to radical faithfulness with "No Limits."

## **1. THE VISION OF WHO CHRIST IS (v.7)**

**Revelation 3:7 - "To the angel of the church in Philadelphia write: 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."**

There's some powerful imagery here:

### **THE HOLY ONE**

**Revelation 3:7 - These are the words of him who is holy...**

The OT calls God the Holy One of Israel. He is separate from His creation, and He is separate from all evil. That's what holy means ... separated. And here Jesus equates Himself with the Father as "him who is holy." He is altogether unique and in class by Himself. And if you and I have this vision of God and Christ it will ignite a new passion for holiness in our lives.

### **THE TRUE ONE**

**Revelation 3:7 - These are the words of him who is holy and true...**

Christ is the real deal ... genuine, authentic. All the gods of this world are false; our God is the One True God. God is faithful, and Christ is His faithful servant. And this vision of Christ fueled the radical faithfulness in the believers in Philadelphia.

### **THE SOVEREIGN ONE**

**Revelation 3:7 - 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.**

Now to understand this imagery we have to go back to the OT to Isaiah 22. (Make a note of that; you can read about it later.) The "key" is the symbol of authority. And what this is saying is that Jesus, and Jesus alone, controls who gets to go to heaven and who doesn't. When Christ opens the door to His Kingdom to His followers, no one can shut it. And when He closes the door to His Kingdom to those who oppose Him, no one can open it.

So Christ is holy, true and sovereign. And we need this vision of who Christ is if we are to live radically faithful lives for Him.

## 2. THE VISION OF WHAT CHRIST HAS DONE (v.8)

**Revelation 3:8b - See, I have placed before you an open door that no one can shut.**

There's every reason to believe that the disciples in Philadelphia were on the verge of quitting. They had little of what the world would call "strength." The opposition from the Jews in the city was oppressive. So they need a vision, not only of who Christ is, but also of what Christ has done. Christ had set before them an open door.

Now what is this "open door"? I think there's a dual meaning here. First, there is the open door we've already talked about ... the open door to the Kingdom of God. But the Bible also uses this phrase "open door" to describe opportunities for ministry and witness.

The open door is where the mission happens. It's easy for churches to forget this. We think the mission is coming to church. No the mission happens after we come to church.

**ILLUSTRATION** – For many believers, what happens here on Sunday morning is like fans going to see a Rangers game. They show up hoping to see the team get a win ... they scream and cheer hoping to watch CJ Wilson throw a perfect game, or Cruz to hit a home run. And if the Rangers win, they go home happy. And if they get creamed like they did last night, they go home sad. But that's not the biblical image of worship. It's not what happens in the stands as the team plays the game down on the field. No, if you want to see the image of biblical worship, you must go into the locker room. It is in the locker room where the team suits up for the game, where they get treatment for their injuries, where they get final instructions from the coach on how the game is to be played, and a motivational challenge that keeps the goal before the team. And they walk out of that locker room to go play the game.

Church, what goes on here on Sunday mornings is not the game (the mission). Our worship, our fellowship, the ministry of the Word in teaching and preaching is what gets us ready for the game (the mission) that starts the minute we walk out of these doors.

And outside these doors Jesus has set before *us* an open door of witness and ministry. Jesus has set before *you* an open door of witness and ministry. Let me be very specific.

- An open door of witness to the people you live around, work with, go to school with and play golf with

Let me take this opportunity to tell you about something you'll want to take advantage of in this regard. Sunday, November 20, has been set aside as Good News Sunday. I know that in these days of revival that God is breaking our hearts over people around us who do not know Christ. Well on Sunday, November 20, I want you to invite those friends to be with you in church. I've asked a gifted young communicator named Ronnie Hill to come and preach that day. He will share the Gospel as clearly as your non-believing friend has ever heard. And

they'll have an opportunity to respond to the Good News of Jesus Christ ... if you invite them. It's an open door.

- An open door of ministry and service to others

I'm thinking about Kids Hope, our mentoring partnership with George C. Clarke Elementary School. Church we have boys and girls who are eager to have a man or woman come to just spend time encouraging them. The school is excited about it. Ultimately we'd like to have 100 mentors ... one child's life changed for each year of ministry we've had in this city. Many of these children are "at-risk" kids. They come from difficult home situations. I can't think of a more powerful way for us to impact the future of this community than to start with the kids. Our leaders tell me that we still have six boys who do not have mentors. That's an open door for a man to invest in the life of a boy.

Christ is holding the door open for you. Will you walk through it? He's holding the door open to our church. Will we walk through it?

Now there's something else that will motivate us to this kind of radical faithfulness to Christ.

### **3. THE VISION OF WHAT CHRIST WILL DO (vv.9-13)**

Just notice the many times in these verses that Jesus says, "I will..."

JESUS WILL VINDICATE US (v.9)

**Revelation 3:9 - I will make those who are of the synagogue of Satan, who claim to be Jews though they are not, but are liars—I will make them come and fall down at your feet and acknowledge that I have loved you.**

Note: There's no promise that vindication will come in this life. As much as we want to be accepted and applauded by the world, the fact is that as we live radically faithful lives for our Savior, in this life we will likely be ridiculed and rejected. But one day we will be vindicated.

JESUS WILL HELP US (v.10).

**Revelation 3:10 - Since you have kept my command to endure patiently, I will also keep you from the hour of trial that is going to come upon the whole world to test those who live on the earth.**

Now this is a promise for the radically faithful about an event that looms on the horizon ... the hour of trial. It seems that Jesus is talking about what is called in the Bible, the Great Tribulation that culminates with Jesus establishing His 1000 year reign upon the earth ... the Millennium.

Now Bible students love to debate this verse as to whether it teaches that the rapture of the church will come before the Great Tribulation, during it, or at the end of it. I'm not going to join that debate

this morning. I simply want to remind you, loved ones in Christ, that we are not destined to endure the wrath of God that will be poured out on the unredeemed inhabitants of the earth.

**1 Thessalonians 1:10 – (We) wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead— Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath.**

So we don't have to fear the outpouring of God's wrath upon the unbelieving world, because just in the right time...

JESUS WILL COME FOR US (v.11).

**Revelation 3:11 - I am coming soon. Hold on to what you have, so that no one will take your crown.**

Church, we must never lose sight of the fact that Christ is coming quickly. When the events of the last days begin to unfold, they will unfold quickly. And Jesus says, "In light of this, hold on." He's not talking about just gutting it out. The word is a great word. It actually means to seize something with power. Seize the opportunities you have in these last days. Remain radically faithful to the very end. And your crown is secure.

JESUS WILL HONOR US (v.12).

This radical faithfulness to Jesus Christ is not something we should expect the world to honor us for. But we can expect that our Lord will honor us. Look at how He does it.

**Revelation 3:12 - Him who overcomes I will make a pillar in the temple of my God. Never again will he leave it. I will write on him the name of my God and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which is coming down out of heaven from my God; and I will also write on him my new name.**

Now what we have here is a glorious picture of heaven. Pillars are a symbol for stability and for beauty. And the new name is the symbol of our new identity.

Jesus is saying, "Don't forget *who* you are, and *whose* you are." Don't let Satan use these hard times you're going through to trick you into thinking that you aren't important to God.

**ILLUSTRATION** – Our on trip to the UK this summer we heard the amazing story of a young Welsh missionary by the name of Robert Jermain Thomas. We visited the church where young Robert felt God's call to go to the Far East to share the Good News of Jesus Christ. In 1860 he married the love of his life, and their honeymoon was a four month voyage to China. But just one year after arriving in China Robert's wife died suddenly. He was heartbroken but he would not be discouraged from his God-given assignment. In those days Korea was a closed nation. Anyone caught distributing Bibles or accepting a Bible was immediately executed. So everyone was surprised when Robert decided to go to Korea to distribute copies of the Bible and to preach the Gospel there. He booked passage on an American ship that was sailing to Korea on a naval mission. As they sailed up a river to a port, Robert went ashore to give Bibles to the Koreans who had

gathered just outside the city of Pyongyang, today the capital of North Korea. He was to be the first protestant missionary in Korea. But a Korean soldier spotted Robert Thomas distributing the Bibles and immediately decapitated him on the spot.

One little 11-year-old boy ended up with 3 of the Bibles that Robert brought ashore. Another one of those Bibles was taken by a Korean government official, who tore out the pages of the Bible and wallpapered a room in his house with them.

In the late 1800s, thirty years after the martyrdom of Robert Jermain Thomas, many things had changed in Korea. For one thing, the nation had opened up, and now many missionaries were coming to Korea from the US and Britain. One of those missionaries was a man named Samuel Moffett. One of Samuel Moffett's first converts was a man who had witnessed the execution of Robert Jermain Thomas. In fact, he was the 11-year-old boy who ended up with three of the Bibles. He bought a house in Pyongyang and found that one of the rooms had been wallpapered with pages from the Bible taken by the Korean official. That house became the meeting place for a church.

Soon a great revival and spiritual awakening was happening in Korea. Over the next decades tens of millions of Koreans would come to faith in Jesus Christ. This spiritual awakening in Korea in the 20<sup>th</sup> century was one of the greatest in the history of the church. Koreans are now sending missionaries all over the world. Many of them come here to Southwestern Seminary to train. In fact, we have many who are members of our church. It all started with the radical faithfulness of Robert Jermain Thomas, who saw the door that Christ opened, and walked through it.

So Jesus holds the keys to heaven and to opportunities in our city. We hold the key to our heart, our lives and our church. Hand over the keys.