

KING OF THE JUNGLE

SERMON TITLE: OFF THE SHELF IN PHILADELPHIA
REVELATION 3:7-13

The Venus Rosewater Dish is awarded to the female winner of the Wimbledon Tennis Championships.

The dish was first awarded to the champion in 1886.

The plate is 19" in diameter and fashioned of sterling silver. It was made in 1864 - which makes it 148 years old. It's styled after a dish on display in the Louvre.

The winner is handed the trophy, and she walks a lap with it around the court... but here's the kicker, *she doesn't take it home!* It stays at the All England Club.

And that's a bummer! This is so disappointing...

Wouldn't it be cool on Super Bowl Sunday to bring that baby out covered with *dip and Doritos* - or serve the Thanksgiving Turkey *on the Wimbledon platter!* You wouldn't have to throw it in the dishwasher or scrub it with a Brillo pad - you could wash and dry it by hand.

I'm just saying why keep the Wimbledon Plate on a shelf? Something that valuable should be put to use!

This is God's thinking as well. He loves His church. We are the apple of His eye. We are the blood bought Bride of Christ. Paul says to the Corinthians we're the clay

vessels in which God has placed the treasures of salvation. You and I are trophies of His amazing grace!

But Jesus doesn't keep dishes on the shelf. He serves up opportunities to serve *on a silver platter!*

He *wins us to use us*. When Jesus *saved your soul*, He *filled your plate* with important business! He dishes up a task or two. The Church at Philadelphia knew the importance of walking through the doors God opens.

I've title this study, ["Off The Shelf In Philadelphia."](#)

Over the last few weeks we've been studying Jesus' letters to the seven churches of Asia. The seven cities He writes to were along the old Roman postal route...

Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamos, Thyatira, Sardis, now Philadelphia... We begin today in Revelation 3:7...

"And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write..." The word **"Philadelphia"** means **"brotherly love."** The Greek king of Pergamos, Eumenes founded the city in 189 BC. He had a brother named Attalus.

They were not only brothers, but best buds.

Attalus was so loyal to his brother he earned the nickname, **"Philadelphos,"** or literally, **"one who loves his brother."** The city was named in honor of Attalus.

Philadelphia was another city in western Turkey. It was 30 miles, and a 2500 feet ascent eastward, from the Hermus Valley and Sardis, to the central plateau.

In ancient times the area was known for its volcanic activity. Thus, the soil was fertile - perfect for the cultivation of grapes. It was the Napa Valley of Turkey.

The city was built on a major highway connecting Europe and Asia. It was the “[Gateway to the East.](#)”

Though the city of Philadelphia was built on an 800 foot rise, which afforded some natural fortifications - it was never meant to be a military outpost. It's founders had a different mission for their new city.

Beyond Philadelphia lay rugged regions: *Phrygia and Galatia*. The tribes who lived there were backwoods.

Philadelphia was built by the lovers and architects of Greek society who envisioned it as a launching pad for the Hellenization of Asia. From Philadelphia the Greek language, and customs, and culture, and religion could be exported eastward to the uncultured masses.

It's interesting, the Christians living in Philadelphia also adopted *a mission mindset*. What made the city a bridge for the spread of Greek culture, also made it a suitable beachhead for the preaching of the Gospel.

The church at Philadelphia was a church on mission.

Like the vineyards that dotted the countryside, this was a fruitful church - [the Church of the open door.](#)

Philadelphia is a reminder to all churches that we too are on mission. Sometimes the hustle and bustle, the comings and goings - the routine of life - dulls our sensitivity to our mission. We forget the big picture.

We can get so caught up in just getting through the next day we forget the reason God has us here in the first place. We lose sight of the issues that will matter a million years from now. We can *miss the mission!*

Familiarity is both *the greatest help* in reaching the people around us and it's *the greatest hindrance*.

Knowing the strain on our neighbors - being able to speak their language - recognizing their joys and goals help us frame the Gospel in ways that matter to them.

But in contrast, familiarity also causes us to become oblivious to those same people and their needs.

We walk past the woman in the grocery store with tears in her eyes, *because she's always there* - or the clerk at the checkout with an ache in his soul, *because he's always there*. We get excited about an *overseas'* mission trip, but we *overlook* the folks on the bus who ride with us to work every single day. The very people we're called to reach, blend in to the woodwork.

I have a friend who lives in Philadelphia, PA. He calls his Philly "*the city of brotherly shove.*" *Do we live there as well?* Are we so busy getting what we want that we tend to shove other people aside - if not literally, then mentally - so we don't have to think about their need.

We grow immune, and this is why we have to work at a missional mindset. I'm not just on this planet to make a living and take up space, my life should count for Jesus. I need to have an eternal impact on my world.

The Church in Philadelphia lived up to their name. "Brotherly love" was their trademark. They loved God and loved people. They got off the shelf to serve.

And here's what motivated their missional mentality - they served a God who also is and stays on mission!

Notice how Jesus introduces Himself to this church, verse 7, "These things says He who is holy, He who is true, "He who has the key of David, He who opens and no one shuts, and shuts and no one opens..."

Here's a grand entrance for the risen, and glorified, and exalted Christ - here's a three-fold introduction... He's "holy," and "true," and carries "keys" on His belt!

Jesus is "He who is holy..." In other words, Jesus is like no one else. He's in a class all by Himself.

To say Jesus is *love* is one thing, but to say He's holy is to say He loves like no one else loves...

To say Jesus is *faithful* is one thing, but to say He's holy is to say He has His own category of faithfulness...

To say Jesus is *righteous* is one thing, but to say He's holy is to say He's right in a way that exposes everyone else as wrong. In chapter 4 the angels that surround heaven's throne shout, "holy, holy, holy."

Jesus is also *“He who is true...”* In the ancient Greek language there were two different words for *“true.”* One was *“true and not false”* - the other *“true and not fake.”*

The word translated here is *“true and not fake.”*

In other words, there’s nothing phony, or hypocritical about Jesus. He’s genuine - full of integrity. He never pretends to be something He’s not. Jesus is *“holy,”* like no one else - and He’s *“true,”* He’s all He claims to be.

And if we follow Him we too should be *“holy and true.”* A life that’s *“holy”* is set apart. I’m here for His purposes - not my own. I’m a man on a mission. Thus, I need to resist distraction, and stay *“true”* to my call.

And thirdly, Jesus introduces Himself as *“He who has the key of David...”* Here's a quote from Isaiah 22...

Isaiah is writing in the days of King Hezekiah and his chief of staff. Shebna has the keys to the kingdom.

But Shebna misuses the king’s authority, and brings shame on Judah. God has to fire Shebna. And in his place, God appoints a new chief of staff, Eliakim.

In Isaiah 22:22 God promises to clothe Eliakim in regal robes - to strengthen him - and give him great authority. God declares, *“The key of the house of David I will lay on his shoulder; so he shall open, and no one shall shut; and he shall shut, and no one shall open.”*

Eliakim would have dominion over all the realm...

He’s given the keys that *unlock the king’s treasury, and open the king’s storehouse, and provide access to the king’s presence, and unleash the king’s army.*

And this is the authority now taken by King Jesus!

Jesus is the King of the Jungle! He roars and doors swing open. He roars again, and doors slam shut.

Jesus' has more keys hanging from his belt, than a night-time security guard. The Living Lord unlocks what He wants opened. He deadbolts what He wants shut.

If it's *treasure* you need - or *sustenance* for which you hunger - or *access* to God you desire - or *power and might* you relish... look to Jesus! He has the keys!

Some of you have keys that open the front door of Calvary Chapel, but not the offices. Some of the staff can open their office, but not my office. But I have a key that'll open every door in the place - a Master Key.

And Jesus has a Master Key for all the universe.

It unlocks heaven to His followers, and locks rebels in hell... It opens Scripture to believing hearts, and shuts it up those that doubt... It buzzes a Christian into God's blessings, and keeps the unbeliever outside... It swings open God's acceptance to people who repent, and it slams shut His rejection on folks who harden their hearts...

Jesus has a key that does all the above!

After Jesus' crucifixion the disciples were hiding in the upper room, behind locked doors, afraid they'd be next. But Jesus appeared. He passed through the wall.

He didn't care about keys... and doors... and locks...

But now He's ascended to heaven, and He's been crowned with authority. He's been given the Messianic keys of David. We're told in Isaiah 9, "the government will

be upon His shoulder.” Today, Jesus is all about opening and shutting doors. He allocates opportunity.

Jesus has a key that “*opens and no one shuts, and shuts and no one opens...*” And notice what else that key fits, verse 8, “*I know your works. See, I have set before you an open door, and no one can shut it...*”

Jesus has the key to the door of opportunity! He was busy opening doors for the Church in Philadelphia.

Here’s good news, when you decide to make your life count for Jesus, He starts to open doors for you...

Just as a conscientious Groom is sure to open the door for His Bride, Jesus will open doors for His Bride.

For some of you logger-headed husbands, your wedding day was the last time you opened the door for your wife - *but not Jesus!* He’s the perfect gentleman!

Opening doors for His bride is Jesus’ specialty!

As we’ve mentioned each week, these seven churches in Asia were not just actual churches, they also represent different eras of church history. And the Church at Philadelphia is associated with the great missionary centuries - the 1700s, 1800s, and 1900s.

The [First Great Awakening](#) occurred in England in the early 18th century with men like Jonathan Edwards and George Whitfield. The spiritual revival that took place

sowed the seeds of freedom and democracy that would eventually spark the American Revolution.

The [Second Great Awakening](#) occurred during the early 19th century. A spiritual movement that brought salvation to the souls of men, set in motion the social consciousness that led to the abolition of slavery.

Historian, J. Edwin Orr, writes of this Second Great Awakening, “[In the mid 1800s, people began to be converted at the rate of 10,000 a week in New York City. The movement spread throughout New England.](#)

[Church bells would bring people to prayer at eight in the morning, twelve noon, and six in the evening.](#)

[Baptists had so many people to baptize, they couldn't get them into their churches. They went down to the river, cut a square in the ice, and baptized them.](#)

[In 1857 more than one million people were converted. The revival crossed the Atlantic, broke out in Northern Ireland, Scotland, Wales, England, South Africa, South India... its effect was felt for 40 years.”](#)

The aftermath of these two Great Awakenings was the missionary movement of the 19th and 20th centuries. [William Carey](#) took the gospel to India - [Adoniram Judson](#) to Burma - [Hudson Taylor](#) to China...

The Philadelphian era saw a church on the move.

Even in more modern times the Church continued to go through open doors. From Bible Translation to Billy Graham - from mission societies to mass evangelism to medical outreach - the Gospel has come to millions.

And the Lord of the Harvest continues to open doors for those who have faith enough to walk through them.

What a stark contrast we find among the first century churches in Asia... Sardis rested on its reputation and past successes, while it died on the vine. Philadelphia was full of fresh faith - on the lookout for open doors.

On a map, the churches were separated by 30 miles, but in terms of mission they were light-years apart.

In November, 2010 a wedding took place on the Australian coast. After the ceremony the wedding party went to a scenic spot along the shore to take pictures.

During the posing, a woman, unrelated to the wedding, fell into the ocean and began to drown.

Immediately the tuxedo-clad best man dove in and pulled the woman toward the shore. The bride, who was also a nurse, waded into the surf to perform CPR.

By the time the lifeguards arrived, the victim had already regained consciousness. And it was thanks to two people who weren't so caught up in their own stuff, that they missed an opportunity to save a life.

The choice that bride and best man made illustrate the decisions we're all called on to make everyday.

Ultimately, *why are we here?*

Is it to dress up for parties, and pose for pictures - or does God want to use us to rescue drowning people?

Certainly, getting married is *a big deal and God's will*. Nobody begrudges a Christian getting married, but ultimately, what is even marriage about, *if not to bring glory to God?* If it's only about parties and posing, then even a good thing can knock us off our mission.

The Church of Philadelphia saw neighbors and friends and coworkers drowning in the surf, and put the parties and pictures on hold to seize an opportunity.

God gave them open doors to influence people.

And God will give you open doors as well. If your life is on mission you won't have to waste a lot of time looking for opportunities to be used. Expect God to bring *hungry, hurting* people across your path.

Trust me there's no shortage of need... God wants to blow your mind at the *marvelous*, and *mighty*, and *many* ways He can put your life to use for His purpose.

And speaking of open doors, let me point to two...

First, is the diversification of our community. Every where I go these days I see folks from other countries.

People are flocking to America from all over the globe. Our country is looking more and more like the world at large. We no longer have to go around the world to be a missionary - *just walk across the street*.

Before He ascended to heaven, Jesus commanded His first disciples to go into all the world. Today, the Lord of the open door is bringing the world to us.

Are we taking advantage of our opportunities?

And the second open door I'd like to point out are the incredible breakthroughs we've seen in technology.

Through Podcasts, Livestream, Apps, Tweets, Text, Facebook - you no longer have to be a *mega-church* to have a *mega-impact*. Bible Studies from CCSM go all over the world via the internet - even into muslim-block countries that are closed politically to the Gospel.

The *interNET* is another *net* we can use to fish for men... These are doors that Jesus has open to us.

In recent years, I've been floored at the amazing opportunities God has given me to share His Word across the country and around the world. In September I spoke twice in California, Arkansas, Virginia, and Washington State. *I have no idea how this happened...*

I didn't seek it out, or promote myself, or try to put myself out there... In His timing God has just opened doors... *And I've walk through as many as possible...*

The Lord Jesus makes a surprising statement in verse 8, **"I have set before you an open door, and no one can shut it; for you have a little strength..."**

You would expect Jesus to say that a church as active as Philadelphia had **"great strength..."** but apparently not! This was a small church with meager resources, but they trusted in the power of the Spirit.

They learned the truth of Paul's statement to the Corinthians, "when I am weak, then I am strong." The power of Jesus always makes up for our inadequacies.

Remember, Jesus is never limited by our lack. He specializes in doing much with the little you bring Him.

He fed the 5000 with five loaves and two fish.

The widow's two mites were the impressive offering. More than just tipping God, she gave all she had left.

And faith the size of a tiny mustard seed will move mountains... *God will turn out meagerness into much.*

Philadelphia was a church without fancy facilities, or a big bank account, or loads of manpower, or a skilled staff, or lots of clever ideas... she had "little strength."

Yet Jesus opened up doors for this church, and gave her enough strength to walk through those doors.

You don't have to be big to leave a big footprint!

In fact, "you can never be too little for God to use, but you can get too big." Philadelphia trusted in God's *power*, not their *prowess*, and God made them *productive*. The church's impact wasn't in proportion to its size. It had a far greater influence than you'd think.

And here's two more important reasons why...

Jesus says of this church at the end of verse 8 - they "have kept My word, and have not denied My name."

Philadelphia was a *fruitful church* because they were a *faithful church*... they upheld God's Word, and they refused to deny His name. What a stellar resume!

Understand, Philadelphia and Smyrna were the only two churches Jesus doesn't rebuke. Not that they were perfect churches. There's no such thing. All churches are made up of people, and all people are sinners.

But these two churches had no glaring weaknesses.

There's no flaw, no chink in their armor, nothing Jesus needs to point out. He's all about encouraging the Church at Philadelphia to greater fruitfulness.

Notice, Jesus commends this church, "**(you) kept My word.**" This is where it begins. If you want *good fruit*, then establish *good roots*. Influential churches are built on teaching God's Word. *What we believe does matter!*

Remember the Church at Pergamos compromised biblical truth. They mixed human philosophy with Christianity... Thyatira ignored God's Word completely, and tolerated full scale idolatry and immorality...

Spiritually speaking, no one starts out on track with God. We all begin behind the eight ball. Our heart is cold, and our eyes are blind, and our neck is stiff...

We just don't know God...

That's why once a person receives new life, the first step is to solve this problem. A faithful church reads, and learns, and studies, and keeps God's Word...

I like what CS Lewis once said, “If you do not listen to theology it does not mean you have no ideas about God, it means you will have a lot of wrong ideas.”

You're behind the eight ball from the start.

The fog doesn't clear until we get into God's Word.

Over the next few months we'll study verse by verse through big chunks of the Bible... What better way to learn this Book than to start tonight with our TTBS.

Jesus also says, “(You) kept My word, and have not denied My name.” When their allegiance to Jesus was tested they refused to back down. They stood strong.

Apparently, they were loyal in the face of opposition.

And there's no secret where the hostility came from, verse 9, “Indeed I will make those of the synagogue of Satan, who say they are Jews and are not, but lie...”

There were Jews in Philadelphia who exalted *law over grace* and *works over faith* - and rejected Jesus as their Messiah. Their synagogue became enemy headquarters. These rabbis attacked the Jews in their community who had believed and become Christians.

Jesus is saying they may have a Jewish pedigree, but they're not part of God's family. As Paul said to the Romans, “For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly... but he is a Jew who is one inwardly... in the Spirit...”

And this is not just true in Philadelphia's synagogue, it's true in churches all across America today. There're people who think they're right with God and part of His

family, because some outward observance - they *go to church*, or *perform a ritual*, or *give an offering*...

But inwardly there's been no change.

Becoming a Christian isn't like putting on make-up. It's more than cosmetic. It's not just turning over a new leaf, or adopting new habits. That's why Jesus said **“you must be born again.”** You need a changed heart.

The Jews in Philly thought they were on God's team, but they had lined up on the wrong side of the ball.

And one day they'll be forced to admit it... Jesus says, **“Indeed I will make them come and worship before your feet, and to know that I have loved you.”**

The believers who were being *violated* will one day be *vindicated*. The Jews who *trashed them*, *accused them*, and *attacked them* will in the end realize the Christians were the folks *God loved as His own*.

Jesus says these Jews will **“worship before your feet.”** **Not before our toes, but before our heels.**

One day every knee will bow before Jesus - as well as the Jews from this **“synagogue of Satan.”** When that day comes, everyone will be lined-up behind the believers who've already concluded that Jesus is Lord.

They won't *bow to us*, but they will *bow with us*. They'll worship before our heels, not before our toes.

Ironically, there're several OT prophecies that speak of Gentiles bowing before Jews. But because the Jews rejected Jesus, in the end the roles will be reversed.

In verse 10, Jesus promises this church, “Because you have kept My command to persevere, I also will keep you from the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth.”

Understand, the Church in Philadelphia, as well as the church in every age, is subject to tribulation. Jesus promised, “In the world you will have tribulation.”

But there’s a difference between *the tribulation the world aims at the church*, and *the tribulation God reserves for the world*. God promises an “*hour of trial*.”

Not necessarily a literal hour - but a specific duration of time. There’s a start and finish to this judgment.

And it’s not localized. It effects “*the whole world*.”

This period of time goes by different names in Scripture... “the time of Jacob’s trouble...” “the seventieth week of Daniel...” “the Great Tribulation...”

But it’s the time when God will unleash His judgment on the rebel planet. A *just God* will punish an *evil world*.

Notice, “*the hour of trial*” is for “*earth-dwellers*.”

That’s good news since we are citizens of heaven. And by this juncture we’ll be caught up with Jesus.

Jesus doesn’t just promise to *get you through*. I like verse 10. It’s specific. He promises to “*keep you from*.”

Understand the structure of the book of Revelation...

Chapters 1-3 are about the church age. The church gets mentioned 19 times. But in chapter 4 a door opens in heaven, a trumpet blows, a voice calls out, "Come up..." Read Paul's description of the rapture in 1 Thessalonians 4, and the two events sound identical.

Revelation 1-3 is about the Church. Then for 14 chapters, from Revelation 6-19, the church is never mentioned. We're in heaven when the Lord Jesus pours out terrible cataclysms that will crash the planet.

In Revelation 4:1 John is invited, "Come up here, and I will show you things which must take place after this..." "This" is the church age. And it's after the church is air-lifted to safety that all hell breaks loose on Earth.

Jesus promises safety from this hour of trial for the church that "*perseveres.*" He says, verse 11, "Behold, I am coming quickly! Hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown." How will He "*keep them from the hour of trial?*" He'll come quickly or suddenly.

As soon as judgment comes down, the church goes up. And we may well be that generation of Christians who will never taste death. *How cool would that be?*

I like these words from an ole Southern preacher, "It's time for this church to wake up, and sing up, and preach up, and pray up, and never give up, or let up, or back up, or shut up - until we're all filled up, or go up!"

There's one certainty, Jesus will return for a feisty bunch - believers who "*persevere*" and who "*hold fast.*"

Brazilians have an interesting word for endurance.

Look up the word “garra” in a Portuguese Dictionary, and you’ll discover the word means “fingernails.”

A person with endurance is a person with nails. They can dig in and hold on. If you want to enjoy all of God’s wonderful promises you need some nails to hold on.

In verse 12, Jesus has several rewards for the faithful church in Philadelphia. “He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he shall go out no more.” This had special meaning for anyone living in Philadelphia during the first century.

Pillars were a key feature of Greco-Roman architecture. All ancient buildings included pillars. Stone pillars were structural, load-bearing, permanent. Pillars lasted long after the building was in ruins.

Being likened to a pillar was a promise of security. A believer has an eternal place in the temple of God.

When the world falls to pieces - and everything that can be shaken ends up shaken - believers in Jesus, who overcame through faith, will stand tall like a pillar.

We’ll be *“a pillar in the temple of our God!”*

“And I will write on him the name of My God and the name of the city of My God, the New Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God. And I will write on him My new name.” Notice, according verse 12, Jesus is a tattoo artist! Our Lord Jesus is into ink!

Today, 15% of all Americans have a tattoo - that's 1 in 8 or 40 million people. Did you know 36% of 20-somethings have a tattoo? That's 1 in 3. Here's a stat - 13% of Republicans and 15% of Democrats are tatted.

Maybe at the next presidential debate the moderator could ask the candidates to show us their tattoos.

Understand, when you walk into this church or any church it takes some time to pick out the true believers.

Just because a person *comes to church, or quotes some Scripture, or says they're a Christian* - doesn't make them one. To identify true believers you've got to inspect their fruit. What's being produced in their life? Is there any love for God or love for other people?

But if you could see with spiritual eyes it would be easy to pick out the Christians. Every believer has a spiritual tattoo! Actually, multiple tattoos - three in fact...

We're all tatted up. Jesus has ink that can mark a spiritual canvass. He writes three names on our spirit.

First is "*the name of God.*" Yahweh is that name - the God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, David, and Jesus!

If you belong to Jesus you belong to God. That's why He writes His name on you... We're His **possession**.

When I was a kid headed to camp, mom wrote my name in my underwear. You don't want to mix up underwear and put on somebody else's whitey-tighties. That's creepy. The first rule of camp is check the name.

This is why Jesus writes God's name on us. We're His belongings and He's marked us as His own.

The second name Jesus writes on us is "*the name of the city of God, the New Jerusalem.*" This is heaven.

"*New Jerusalem*" is heaven's official name. This is so encouraging - God stamps us with our **destination**.

For every 1000 passengers that fly Delta Airlines there are a measly 2.66 reports of mishandled bags.

That's pretty good... *There's only one problem.* One of those two mishandled bags is always mine. That's why I never check bags. Fly with me and you carry on!

But when you fly with God you always reach your destination. He's never lost or mishandled a bag or boy. If you could see with spiritual eyes you've got this big, broad "*New Jerusalem*" tattoo on your shoulder.

Then finally, Jesus says He's tattooed us with "*My new name.*" The idea of a new name implies **intimacy**.

Jesus is committed to keeping our relationship with Him fresh, new, vibrant. He continues to invest in us by revealing new aspects of His nature and His name.

I read recently an article on the power of renaming.

Giving something a new name doesn't alter what's being named, but you can correct misconceptions, and instill new meaning through the process of renaming.

For example, restaurants had a tough time selling **dolphin fish**. People confused it with the mammal by the same name. *Customers thought they were eating Flipper*. So in the mid-80s restaurant owners renamed dolphin fish. Today, they call it **mahi-mahi**. Yum, yum.

Today, **chinese gooseberries** are a popular selling fruit, but it took a name change... In the 60s produce sellers dropped the “**gooseberries**” and called it **kiwi**.

Understand, I'm not suggesting there's anything about Jesus that needs changing or freshening up.

But the promise of a new name reminds me that there's more to Jesus than what I've previously known.

Realize, **Jesus is always bigger than my understanding of Him**. Be open to His new names.

Jesus tats us up with names... He owns us... He'll deliver us... And He want us to know Him more...

Jesus is the King of the Jungle!

When He roars... demons flee, mountains melt like wax, obstacles disappear, bolted doors swing open...

Maybe you need a door opened in your life this morning. Don't call a locksmith. Call the Lord of the Open Door!.. And when He opens a door of opportunity have some faith. Get off the shelf and on the move!