

The One Who Opens The Door

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Preacher: Nick Louw

[0 : 00] I want to start this morning by asking the question, are you sure that you've got the right religion? Have you ever thought about that? I mean, there are over 4,000 to choose from at last count.

And they're all claiming, all of them, in some way or another, they claim that they are the ones who help you to access the supernatural, or access God in one form or another.

So how do you know this is the right one? Are you sure you chose right? I mean, maybe you didn't even choose. Maybe you've just been brought up coming to church.

And you never actually had that moment of choosing, well, this is what I'm going to follow. And it's an important question. It's an important question to ask yourself. Why this one?

Because it's not actually the most popular. Protestant Christianity has not the most numbers in the world. In fact, Islam has more adherence than Protestant Christianity.

[1 : 03] It's also not the oldest. Hinduism and Judaism are both older than Christianity. So why this religion? Is this really the right one? Maybe you've got a friend at work or in your family or a friend close to you at the sports club who's trying to convince you, no, no, no, no, you've got it wrong.

You Christians have got it wrong. This is not what the Bible says. This is actually the truth. And maybe you are questioning in your own mind. Maybe you've been coming to church for a long time, but you're still at the back of your mind.

You look out into what the world is saying. You look out at all the options there, and you're going, have I made the right choice? Well, that is certainly a question the Christians in the first century would have been asking when their religion was brand new.

And they were surrounded by older, more established religions that all claimed, no, no, you've got it wrong. This is the way to God. And in fact, that's exactly the situation.

These Philadelphian Christians, when they were surrounded by these established religions who wanted to convince them, you sect, you new Christian sect, you Jesus followers have got it wrong.

[2 : 12] And if you want to access the true God, you must come through these proper established religions which have been around for millennia. And you can imagine the pressure that they were under and the doubts they had going, yeah, they might be right.

I mean, is this right, or was I just swept up in all the emotion of it? Is it actually right? And that's why Jesus writes this letter to them, because they're in that situation.

And in this very, very important letter, the letter to Philadelphia, Revelation 3, 7 to 13, Jesus here explains a key truth about religion that we all need to hear and learn and inwardly absorb this morning.

And basically what he says in this letter to these Philadelphian Christians, inundated with doubt and these bigger religions around them, telling them that they're wrong, and telling them that, no, no, you have to come to us to have access to God.

Jesus writes this letter and effectively says, no, no religion gives people access to God. Not even Christianity. Only I do.

[3 : 34] That's what he's saying here. You know, Jesus never said, Christianity is the way, the truth, and the life. He said, I am the way, the truth, and the life. And there's a big difference between those two things, and it's a difference we need to understand and appreciate this morning before we leave this place.

And so let's have a look from this letter what we learn. And we see this difference highlighted, in fact, we see this point that Jesus is trying to make about religion highlighted in how the letter starts. Have a look at verse 7 and listen to how Jesus is introduced. The introduction, by the way, of Jesus in all of these letters is unique to the letter. It's different for each letter, you would have noticed, and

it has something particularly about him which these particular people need to hear and understand, and which we do today.

Listen to how he's introduced, verse 7. Write to the angel of the church in Philadelphia, Thus says the Holy One, the true One, the One who has the key of David, who opens and no one will close, and who closes and no one will open.

Okay, now this key of David, what is that talking about? Because we haven't actually come across that in Revelation before, and we won't in the rest of the book. It's unique here in Revelation. What is the key of David?

[4 : 54] Well, unsurprisingly, it's from the Old Testament, and it's from Isaiah 22. You don't have to turn there, but it's talking about the one who was the steward of the royal palace in Jerusalem, and he was known as the one who holds the key of David, who allows access to the seat of the kingdom, and essentially, therefore, the kingdom itself.

He controlled access. He decided who was allowed in and who wasn't, because not everyone was allowed into the palace, right? Anyone been to Buckingham Palace in London?

Anyone visited London, and you've stood there, and you've watched the royal guards, and stood outside the gates, and you've seen Buckingham Palace? Okay. There's quite a few people.

Anyone been inside Buckingham Palace? Really? Seriously? Seriously? Wow. It kind of messes up my illustration, but that's awesome. Okay.

Most people, except a few select people, most people can't access Buckingham Palace, right? And even when you do, you need special access. You didn't just waltz in from the street, did you, Mary?

[6 : 01] So that's the thing about a place like a palace. You need special access into it. You know, most of the plebs, the rest of us, sorry, the rest of us, Mary, are outside Buckingham Palace.

We're just the pedestrians. We can't cross that fence and go, and you need special access. You know what? It's the same with God's kingdom and God's presence.

And every religion has recognized that in some way or another, that humans in our nature, sinners, can't just waltz into the presence of a holy God. There is a huge gate outside, and none of us, by our own merits, can get access.

And that's, it's not just what Christianity says. That's what every religion says. But every religion, of course, claims that they are the ones that control that access. And that's essentially what a religion is.

It's a set of instructions of how to get access to the supernatural or to God. And so every religion claims to be the gatekeeper to that palace. And you have to fulfill their particular requirements to get in.

[7 : 09] Whether it's the seven pillars of Islam or whether it's the masses of Roman Catholicism, every religion has their requirements, right? For access. Well, here in this letter, in the first line, Jesus is making clear that they do not control access to God.

God, no religion holds the keys because I hold the keys, Jesus is saying here. And that is a very important message.

Jesus is saying, no religion holds the keys. I hold the keys. And I alone, one man, one individual person holds the keys to God, to access. And that means that access to God is not based on your religious affiliation or your label.

but it's only based on whether you know the one who holds the keys. You know, so if you, if you, if you go to Buckingham Palace and you're just one of the, the crowd, you can't get in.

Maybe if, if you have special privileges you can. But you normally can't. Unless, if you knew the one who controls access and he knew you, well then it's a different story, right?

[8 : 29] That's the point Jesus is making here. You can only have access if you know the one who holds the keys. Have a look, therefore, at what he says in verse 8.

Have a look at verse 8 of Revelation 3. He says, I know your works, I have placed before you an open door that no one can close because you have but little power yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name.

Very important verse because what he's saying is that the Philadelphian Christians were given an open door. He is the one who holds the keys and he has now opened access to the palace to them and not because of who they were.

In my translation and some translations it says that I have placed before you an open door no one closed because you have but little power.

you can't get in it yourself but I have opened it for you. So they have got this open door but not because of who they were or what they had achieved.

[9 : 41] Purely because of their loyalty to Jesus Christ. That is the only thing that made them know the one who holds the keys and they were loyal to him and he knew them in response.

Again, verse 8 at the end. Have a look again. At the heart ends. You have kept my word and have not denied my name. You know me. That's what got them access.

They clung to his word and they were unashamed to call him Lord. That's it. They didn't earn access. It wasn't because of who they were.

It wasn't because of the religion they had. It was because of who they knew. You see, that's the important point here. When it comes to salvation, it's not what you know.

it's who you know. That is the most important thing. If you take home nothing else today, take home that. When it comes to salvation, when it comes to accessing God, it is not what you know that matters.

[10 : 46] And it is not what you call yourself. It is only who you know. and whether you know the one who holds the keys and whether you cling to his word and whether you call him Lord.

Why? Why is he the only one who holds the keys? Well, because he is the only one who is qualified to save others, which is the very thing. Sin is the very thing that keeps us from accessing God.

And Jesus Christ is the only one throughout history who has ever been qualified to give access to others because only he died for sins that cut us off from that access and from God and from life.

No religion died for sins. Right? Nobody else was on that cross. Only Jesus was.

He was alone. Only he was the one who died for sins and therefore only he, that man, that one person can give anyone access to God.

[11 : 47] No religion can. And so only he has the keys. That is the truth that is in this passage. And that's why access to God and to life and to the kingdom will never be based on how well you've kept the requirements of a particular religion.

And this is so important to realize. Especially if you're not very good at religion. Maybe you're not very good at all this.

maybe you look at yourself and you go, you know, I'm not a very good Christian. I fall short. You know, maybe as we've been looking at these letters in Revelation for the past few weeks, you've been hearing the demands and the expectations Jesus has of his church and you, in the back of your mind, have been going, that's just not me.

I can't do that. I'm not good enough. I'm not a good Christian. Christian. Well, if that's what you've been thinking these last few weeks, I have good news for you.

That's why the letters haven't ended yet. That's why we have this letter to assure us of the truth, the key truth, the important truth, the vital truth, that if you know Christ, that man, if you know him and he knows you, I'm not just saying you call yourself a Christian, but you have a relationship with Christ and you are loyal to him as your Lord and you cling to the words he has said and you're not ashamed to call him Lord, then no matter how weak you are, no matter how other people might say you're not good enough, this is saying that your Lord through the cross opened a door for you that no one can close.

[13 : 36] That is what Jesus achieved for those who are his. he opened the door for you that no one is able to close. And if you're a Christian, if you follow Jesus, if he's your Lord, you're loyal to him, and he knows you and he knows that you're his, well then rest in that truth that he has opened a door for you that no one can close, especially when you are weak and you are tired and you are failing at all kinds of things.

That door stays open for you because of what he did on the cross for his people, those who keep his word and do not deny his name.

The door that no one can shut. But it's also because he alone controls access and no religion does that despite all the religions in the world, there's only ever been one way to God.

And that's the next thing we see in this passage, only ever one way in. And that's what Jesus is actually reminding people of in the very next verse. Verse 9, have a look.

This is quite an important verse and we need to unpack it a little bit. Note this, I will make those from the synagogue of Satan who claim to be Jews and are not but are lying, I will make them come down and bow down at your feet and they will know that I have loved you.

[15:04] Okay, so he's talking here about the Jews in the city of Philadelphia, the religious Jews who have been established there for centuries and they would have been saying to these new Philadelphian Christians, you're not the ones with access, we are.

We are the ones who know Yahweh, we are the ones who know the Bible, we are the ones with access to the true God. After all, you Christians, doesn't the Bible say that the Gentiles will come to the Jews for salvation?

And you know what? They would have a point because it does. That's exactly what the Bible says. In fact, listen again to the prophecy from Isaiah 60 that was read for us earlier which is a prophecy about the future of the people of Israel.

Israel. I'm going to read from Isaiah 60. You can turn there as well or you can just listen along. Isaiah 60.

I'm just going to read some select verses which is a prophecy about the future of Israel. Listen to what it says. Isaiah 60 from verse 2. Look, darkness will cover the earth and total darkness the peoples or the nations but the Lord will shine over you, Israel, and His glory will appear over you.

[16:41] Nations will come to your light and kings to your shining brightness. Raise your eyes and look around. They all gather and come to you. Your sons will come from far away and your daughters on the hips of nannies.

Then verse 11. And already you read that and you're starting to get migration back into the land of Israel in the early 1900s in your mind.

Verse 11. Your city gates will always be open. They will never be shut day or night so that the wealth of the nations may be brought into you with their kings being led in procession.

Verse 12. For the nation and the king that will not serve you will perish. Those nations will be annihilated. This is talking about the future of Israel. Verse 14. The sons of your oppressors will come down and bow down to you.

All who revile you will fall face down at your feet and they will call you the city of the Lord, Zion, of the Holy One of Israel. This is one of the favorite verses of Zionists, those who want to reestablish Jerusalem and the land of Israel and the temple, go to.

[17:51] To show the Jewish people showing that this is why Israel is so important. The nations are going to one day, according to this prophecy, recognize that Israel are God's beloved people.

He loves them and despite all the oppression that they receive, nations will eventually humble themselves before the Israelites and their oppressors, which are many, will eventually lose and come bow down at their feet.

And that's why, it's because of prophecies like this in the Bible, that so many people are pro-Israel. In Cape Town at the moment you've got a lot of Muslims flying the pro-Palestinian flag and one of the reasons they're flying that flag, not all of them, but a lot of the Muslims flying, and you've seen it, right?

Bumper stickers, flags, one of the reasons people fly that, Muslims especially, is because they know the Christians support Israel. And so anything that's going to stick it to the Christians, even if they don't care about Palestine, they're still going to fly some flags.

And a lot of Christians support Israel because of verses like this in our Bible. And you'll go on the internet and you'll hear very well reputed Christian teachers saying this is why Israel is going to win, this is why the Arab nations are not going to defeat them, because one day the nations are going to recognize that they are the people of God, and they will eventually win the conflict, and people will flock to Jerusalem.

[19:19] Okay, that's the prophecy in Isaiah 60. But I want you to look very carefully in Revelation again, Revelation 3, to how Jesus himself interprets Isaiah 60.

How Jesus himself quotes this passage that I've just read from Isaiah 60, here in Revelation 3 verse 9, and I want you to notice who he's applying it to. Revelation 3 verse 9, he says to the Philadelphian Christians, who are Gentiles, by the way, he says, note this, I will make those from the synagogue of Satan, those who claim to be Jews and are not, but are lying, I will make them come bow down at your feet, and they will know that I have loved you.

See what he's saying here? He's saying that true Jews are not these people who claim to be Jews because of their ethnicity or their religion.

true Jews, the true nation of Israel, are not ethnic Israel, not those at the synagogue in Philadelphia. In fact, Jesus says that's where Satan rules, Satan rules them because they deny Christ, they deny

the truth.

And so those people who were God's people who are now in the synagogue and call themselves Jews, those people who were God's people who are now in the country of Israel and call themselves Jews and God's people, they are no longer, they are the synagogue of Satan because they deny the true king of Israel.

[20 : 45] It's clear in the Bible. Jesus himself interprets Isaiah 60 that way. And yet Christians are still interpreting Isaiah 60 wrong. See, the true Israel, it's not just here, it's all over the New Testament, the true Israel are those who recognize and are loyal to the true king of Israel, whether they're ethnically Jews or not.

Listen to Romans 2. Romans 2. 28-29. For a person is not a Jew who is one outwardly, and true circumcision is not something visible in the flesh.

On the contrary, a person is a Jew who is one inwardly, and circumcision is of the heart, by the spirit, not the letter. And then Galatians 3.

Verse 7. Those who have faith, the faith of Abraham, are the true children of Abraham. And I can list a whole lot of verses that show that ethnic Israel are not truly Israel, according to the New Testament, because they have denied their own king.

But those who have submitted to him, those who are loyal to him, those who have clung to his word and not denied his name, they are the true people of God. And that means that this prophecy in Isaiah 60 and all the others about Israel are not about national Israel, but they're about us.

[22 : 08] They're about Christians who know Christ. And that is a key piece of information in order to unlock your Old Testament.

Now go back to all those prophecies, Isaiah and Malachi and all of them that talk about Israel, and read them as talking about the church, Christians, and it will blow your mind all the promises God has made to his people, those who follow his son.

All of those Old Testament prophecies, they are not irrelevant, they are not talking about some nation in the Middle East, they are talking about us, go read your Old Testament again with that view, and you'll be amazed at what it says about the church.

But do you see how that also flips the situation in Philadelphia totally on its head? Do you see that? Right? The Jews in Philadelphia were saying submit to us to be part of the kingdom, God's kingdom.

We are the established, we are the way, submit to us. And Jesus in this letter says we'll actually know they will need to submit to you if they want to be part of the kingdom.

[23 : 20] It's totally completely opposite. In Isaiah 60 it is saying that the Gentiles, the nations, would have to come to the Jews and submit to them to know God. Jesus is saying, well they will, but the nations are those who don't know Christ, and the true Jews are those who do.

And so the Jews who don't know me are going to have to come submit to you. It totally flipped that prophecy on its head. It's amazing because of what Jesus is saying here.

You actually own the kingdom, not them. It's like a, you know, they were sitting on the fact that they owned the kingdom, and they wanted everyone to come to them and be impressed with them because they were the access to the kingdom.

Jesus is saying, no, no, it's the other way around. It's like, imagine a guy in Clifton passes like a fancy car parked in the street, and then he's looking at this car, and he's like, whoa, this is really nice.

And then he sees a pretty girl walking down the street, and he sidles up to this car, and he's like, hi, do you like my car? And then she takes out the keys, and she says, you mean my car?

[24 : 36] Can you please get out of the way? That's kind of what was happening here. Jesus is saying to these Gentile Philadelphian Christians, this is your kingdom.

Don't let them tell you it's theirs, and if they want to be part of it, they're going to have to submit to you. They're going to have to come and listen to what you, you little ragtag group of Christians that they call a cult and no one likes.

Everybody will have to come submit to you and listen to what you have to say if they want access to God. That's how it's going to be from now on, Jesus says. Simply because, not because you're strong, not because you're influential, and this is a message to us today, not because there's anything special about us, not because we're persuasive, not because we have fancy YouTube channels or anything like that, but simply the reason that people will have to come to the church to

Christians and submit to them and listen to what they have to say if they want to know God is because Christians know the name of the one who holds the keys. You and I know the name of the one who holds the keys, the only one who holds the keys to God. And that is why Jesus ends the letter by saying this in verse 12. Have a look. the one who conquers, I will make a pillar in the temple of my God. [26 : 03] You know what the temple was? It was the place where God and humans met together. And now these Christians will be pillars. They will make up the temple. And he will never go out again.

I will write on him, the one who conquers, the Christian, the name of my God and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem. Not the old Jerusalem in Middle East right now. The new Jerusalem, the true place where people come to meet God, which is what Isaiah is actually talking about when the nations will gather to Jerusalem. It's not talking about the city in the Middle East right now.

It's talking about the people of God. The new Jerusalem which comes down out of heaven from my God and my new name. Again, this is all a reference to Isaiah 60 verse 14, which said, let me just remind you, the sons of your oppressors will come bow down to you, all who revile you will fall face down at your feet, and they will call you the city of the Lord, Zion, the Holy One of Israel. Here, Jesus is saying to these Philadelphian weak Christians, they will call you the city of the Lord. You will be. I will give you the name of the city.

[27 : 13] And so that's a promise to Christians in every place who conquer. Christians in every place who conquer will be the city of God around the world.

How do they conquer? How do Christians conquer? Or overcome? In some translations, you may see posters on telephone poles or Facebook posts about overcoming ministries. You come with the overcomers. What does it actually mean to overcome? Does it mean to have a lot of wealth or to have a lot of prosperity? No, no, to overcome means this. In fact, Revelation tells us.

Revelation 12 verse 11. How do Christians overcome? How do Christians conquer? Revelation 12 verse 11. We'll look at it on Christmas Day in more detail.

But it says this. They conquered him, that's the evil one, by the blood of the lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they did not love their lives to the point of death.

[28 : 11] That's how Christians conquer. Christians conquer by not denying Christ's name, and they are not ashamed of talking about Jesus to all they come across.

Those are the ones who conquer. Because you know what? Satan wants you to be ashamed. Satan wants you to shut down. Satan doesn't want you to bring Jesus into the workplace, to bring Jesus into the public space.

And so the ones who conquer him are the ones who are unashamed to do that. The ones who are unashamed to talk about Jesus to all they come across, they are the temple. They are the true city of God, where the nations will access him.

In other words, it's their lives that are the place where the nations will come to meet God. Those Christians in the world who conquer, who conquer their fear, who conquer the narrative of the world around them, and are unashamed to tell people about the one who holds the keys.

Christians. Are you one of those? Are you one of those Christians? If you call yourself a Christian, are you one of these conquerors?

[29 : 20] If you call yourself a Christian, do you call yourself a Christian? And if so, what do you mean by that? Do you mean that you're a member of the Christian religion?

well, sorry, that's not going to get you in. Only relationship with Jesus is, and those aren't the same thing.

You can be a Christian, you can be a member of a church, and you can still not have a real relationship with Jesus and be loyal to Him. Being a member of a church will help you to have a relationship with Jesus.

It is necessary, but it is not sufficient. it is not a given that just because you are called a Christian, that you have a real relationship with Jesus Christ.

And He is the only one who holds the keys. Being a Christian is not enough. And if that is the case, if you are a Christian but you don't have a relationship with Christ, if He is not your Lord, then you need to change that.

[30 : 27] You need to do something about that. You need to go home and you need to bow down to Him and you need to submit your life to Him and say, Jesus Christ, you are the one who holds the keys.

You are the Lord of heaven and earth. I submit to you. I will not deny your name. I will cling to your word from this day on. Save me. Because only you can do it. And if you have done that, and if you do know Christ and He is your Lord, then realize you are the place where the world meets with God. You are their access to life. Because you know the name of the one who holds the keys. That's what Jesus was saying to these weak Philadelphian Christians.

You are their access. They will need to come to you. because you are the one who knows the name of the one who holds the keys. Now, what that means is don't keep that name to yourself.

If you are the person in your workplace or in your sports club who knows Jesus, and you know the name of the one who holds the keys, the only access to God, do not keep that name to yourself.

[31 : 47] Don't close that door to others because talking about Jesus is uncomfortable or not politically correct or awkward. That shouldn't matter if you realize that you are the only way that those around you can know God and access real life.

Think about that for a second. You and the other people who know Jesus are the only way that those people in your school, your sports club, your classroom, your office, maybe you're the only true Christian they know.

Think about it. You are the only way that they can access life because you know the one who holds the keys. Don't keep him to yourself.

That is exactly why on Friday we're going to take the opportunity of this public holiday to make contact as a church with those around us, to invite them to our Christmas services. I encourage you to do that personally as well.

Because you see, as God's people, we have a job to do. We can't keep Jesus to ourselves. He is the only way people can be saved. And we must make him known.

[32 : 57] And Christmas is the easiest time of the year to do that. Don't waste this opportunity. And coming on Friday and handing out leaflets and talking to people and being friendly and smiling to people, it's the easiest way, right?

To open a door for them to come and hear about Christ and know Christ. So come join us. Come join us. Or if you can't, think of how you can use Friday, use this month, use this season as a way to perhaps show others to Jesus so that they might find him and that they might find the door that he opened to life that no one can shut.

Let's pray. Oh Lord, we thank you that all of your word is fulfilled in Christ.

There is no part of your word that is not finding its yes and amen in Christ. And Lord, this prophecy about the nations coming to know you and coming to submit to your people, Lord, we are bowled away when we think that it's talking about us, that people will need to hear what we have to say. in order to be saved, Lord, help us to realize that because we know the name of the one who holds the keys, we have a job to do and help us to do that job well this month.

[34 : 25] And I pray for any who are here who might call themselves a Christian but do not have a relationship with Jesus. Help them to realize, Lord, that Christianity does not hold the keys, only you do.

And so help them to submit to you as their Lord, to not deny your name, and to cling to your word, so that they may too have an open door that no one can close.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.