

An Open-Door Policy Revelation 3:7-13

Day 1: Revelation 3:7 The key of David

In Isaiah 22, God deposes one Israelite prime minister – Shebna – and appoints another – Eliakim – in his place. The latter will have full administrative and political authority over the entire nation: “I will place on his shoulder the key to the house of David; what he opens no one can shut, and what he shuts no one can open” (Isa 22:22).

Subsequently, Jewish interpreters applied this promise to the nation in a spiritual sense: “‘I will place the key of the *sanctuary* and the authority of the house of David in his hand.’” In this development, the text came to mean that ethnic Israel would govern access to God for all nations. This was a core tenet of Jewish expectations for the future: that any nations or peoples which sought access to YHWH would come through Israel, and through the Jerusalem temple.

In quoting this text, John transfers the authority of controlling access to God from Israel as a nation to Jesus. He is the one who grants or withholds access to the Father. This is a word of assurance to those who are being excluded from synagogue and temple due to their confession of Christ. They may be excluded from the synagogue, but they are invited into the kingdom and people of God. Today this text is more generally an assurance to anyone excluded from social networks because of their confession of Christ. Jesus holds the key to the kingdom of God: whatever other networks may exclude or ostracize us, we are included in the network which matters most, by the doorkeeper who alone matters.

Day 2: Revelation 3:7-8 An open door

This door has two features: (a) it is open, (b) no one can shut it. Each feature responds to the occasion in which the Philadelphian Christians find themselves. They ostracized, perhaps even kicked out of the synagogue: no one can block their entrance through this door, however. In the face of persecution, they have stood firm and fast, but the struggle has left them exhausted: thankfully, Jesus holds the door for them.

These features might not resonate with us, if we are not exhausted from the struggle either against sin or for ministry. But to those who are tired from the battle, this is a reassuring promise from God: he holds the door open for those who have kept his word and honored his name, and whose strength was sapped in the process. God does call us to a high standard: no matter what the opposition, or the cost, we must be faithful

to him, his name, and his Word. At the same time, he sympathizes with us in the struggle, and cares for those exhausted by the battle.

Day 3: Revelation 3:9 Retribution, not revenge

Sometimes Christians react to such verses as this: "I will make them come and fall down at your feet and acknowledge that I have loved you." Aren't Christians supposed to forgive, not seek revenge? What delight should we take from such a promise?

Such concerns fail to distinguish retribution from revenge.

Scripture promises that God will, at the end of time, punish those who disobeyed him or afflicted his people. This is retribution. It achieves two positive ends: (1) it sets the world to rights, settling accounts for those evil deeds which went unpunished in this life, while rewarding the righteous who suffered in this life; and, (2) it enables the unjustly persecuted to eschew revenge or animosity toward those who harass them.

God's promise of retribution can accomplish both of these goals for us, too. It reassures us that even if this life bashes us around, in the next God will set the matter right. It also assures us that whenever people may bash us in this life for the name of Christ, we need not seek revenge: God will take care of that more effectively and more justly than we ever could.

Day 4: Revelation 3:8-12 Works as a condition of salvation

Salvation has a dual time reference: we are saved now, and we are saved in the future when we pass through the final judgment and enter heaven. At both times, salvation comes through the grace of God and the death of Christ. The condition for the former is faith alone. The condition for the latter includes works, a life of obedience to God. We saw this affirmed most strongly in the letter to the Christians in Sardis, but it is presumed here also, and four times in quick succession.

Jesus knows their deeds (3:8a); in response, he places before them a door that no one can shut (3:8b). They have kept his command to endure oppression and persecution (3:10a); consequently, Jesus will keep them from the coming time of tribulation (3:10b). They are to continue in this pattern, holding on a little longer as they have thus far (3:11a), so that they will not lose their crown (3:11b). Those who overcome (3:12a) will receive the reward of God's eternal presence (3:12b).

For us no less, how we live after we believe matters no less than whether or not we believe in the first place. Jesus calls us not just to believe in him, but also to live for him. Revelation confirms that our eternity depends no less on the latter than on the former.

Day 5: Revelation 3:10 Preservation from the hour of trial

A complex theology of the end times has developed, mostly in America, and is frequently imposed on the biblical text, especially Revelation. In the most common version of this schema, a fierce tribulation will precede the end times, but faithful Christians escape that suffering through a prior 'rapture'. There are at least two problems with such a schema. First, Revelation was written to a first-century audience facing persecution, and addressing their struggles, not some undefined time in the remote future. Secondly, the phrase 'keep from' appears only once else in the New Testament, where it expressly signifies not removal from, but preservation through, a difficulty: "My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you *keep them from* the evil one" (John 17:15). So here Jesus is promising to preserve his faithful followers through a period of suffering, not to remove them from it.

The expectation in Judaism and early Christianity was that a period of great suffering would precede the final victory of God over evil. Here, as in Revelation as a whole, Christians are not protected from tribulation, but are preserved through it. If the end of time occurs in our generation, we may well be called to live through a tribulation. But even if not, this text applies secondarily to all those smaller trials we face: God typically does not protect us *from* them, but delivers us *through* them, as we cling to him in our struggles and weakness.

Day 6: Revelation 3:12 A pillar in the temple of God

One of the great blessings of Eden was for man and woman to live in the presence of God. To lose this blessing was one of the judgments from the fall. Ever after, Israel's history pivoted around the issue of how the presence of God could be restored: fire and cloud in the wilderness, tabernacle in the desert, temple in Jerusalem. Now, in Revelation 3 comes the fullest restoration of Eden, and even its supersession: those who are faithful to Christ will dwell in the heavenly temple of God; more than that, they will be one of the pillars of that temple. They will live forever within God's his presence never to leave it again. They will be emblazoned with the name of God, the name of his holy city, Jerusalem, and the name of Jesus. Though excluded in this life from synagogue and temple, these believers will not only enter the heavenly temple, they will be central to its structure, and they will bear the name of the holy city.

This promise applies most directly, of course, to those who are excluded from the dominant religious and political life because of their allegiance to Christ. Still, at a secondary level, it applies to us also, even

barring persecution or ostracism. Even though on occasion we may be marginalized culturally, socially, or vocationally because of a commitment to Christ, in future we will be welcomed among Jesus' inner circle in the coming kingdom. The blessings of eternity offset any losses for Christ in this life.