Mid Week Lent Sermon on Revelation 3 April 1, 2020

To the Church in Philadelphia

7 “And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write: ‘The words of the holy one, the true one, who has the key of David, who opens and no one will shut, who shuts and no one opens.

8 “ ‘I know your works. Behold, I have set before you an open door, which no one is able to shut. I know that you have but little power, and yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name. 9 Behold, I will make those of the synagogue of Satan who say that they are Jews and are not, but lie—behold, I will make them come and bow down before your feet, and they will learn that I have loved you. 10 Because you have kept my word about patient endurance, I will keep you from the hour of trial that is coming on the whole world, to try those who dwell on the earth. 11 I am coming soon. Hold fast what you have, so that no one may seize your crown. 12 The one who conquers, I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God. Never shall he go out of it, 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 from my God out of heaven, and my own new name. 13 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.’

Hold on to faith in the midst of suffering as Christ opens a door for witness

The ancient city Philadelphia lay at the head of a long valley which enabled it to be a gateway to a great commercial trade route. The Lord speaks to His church there about another door that had nothing to do with geography or commerce but a door that He opened for his church to bring the message of His victory to others.

He expected his people to carry out the mission of the church. He expects this whether convenient or not. Why not take full advantage of a golden opportunity to share Christ’s salvation to those who have never heard?

The Christians in Philadelphia had recognized the “opened door” and did proclaim the Gospel but not to full advantage. Though they had kept His Word and not denied their Lord’s name, they were weak in their mission activities to the point where they were more of a road block so that not everyone could hear of the grace of God.

How do we compare to Philadelphia? It is easy to excuse our lack of witnessing in an age of secularism where Christianity is not allowed publicly. If religion is only to be a private matter never to be discussed than what does it say of our own faith?

Boldness and courage in speaking to others about Christ begins in Him who opened the door. When he burst forth from the grave, he now holds the keys to Death and Life. Is that for you only or for all?

His death opened the kingdom of heaven to all and so unites all nations that were scattered to come into the Heavenly Jerusalem which is His church. There was a rift in Philadelphia between Jewish people opposed to salvation by grace in Christ Jesus and the Christians who were both Jews and Gentiles.

Christ does not include the Jewish people who rejected Him and His salvation part of the true Israel nation of His church. He said in verse 9 “Behold, I will make those of the synagogue of Satan who say that they are Jews and are not, but lie – behold, I will make them come and bow down before your feet, and they will learn that I have loved you.”

The true Israelites come from every nation who accepted Jesus as Messiah and the one who fulfilled God’s covenant with Abraham. Salvation is in Christ only through whom all families on earth are blessed.

Opposition to the Gospel caused Christians to suffer in Philadelphia but they remained faithful to the Lord and did not deny His Holy name. Because they kept Christ’s Word during their trials waiting upon Him, Christ promised to defend them when the Great Troubles and Tribulation will come upon the earth before His Second Coming.

No matter how much suffering and persecution the church may experience, the Lord will see his people through so that they do not lose faith. Christ promises to come quickly. That means we need and want to take advantage of every open door to speak of His Love. The time is short and the opportunities are there even in these strange days of self-isolation, we are not alone. With God’s help, we too can quickly complete the church’s mission for He is coming quickly.

Christ urges us to hold on to our crown, as He did to our brothers and sisters in Philadelphia and in Smyrna who were about to face bitter persecution. It is indeed an honour to suffer for the sake of Christ who is our Life, so that we can share in His crown of gold in eternity.