

Good Church, Bad Church (Part 5) – Rev 3:7-8

Rev 3:7-8. We're on the downhill side of a mini-series in our study of the book of Revelation, called Good Church, Bad Church. Because Jesus addresses 7 first century churches, representative of *all* churches, commending them for their *good* qualities, and warning them about their bad ones. All for the purpose of encouraging us to hold fast.

➤ We've covered 5 so far, and the 6th is the church in Philadelphia. So named, because one of its earliest kings was named **Attalus II Philadelphus**. And Philadelphia came to mean "city of brotherly love" because Attalus Philadelphus loved his older brother Eumenes (II) so much. Even refusing to overthrow him with the backing and urging of Rome. He was highly deferential.

But that was 160BC. 250 years *before* this message from Jesus. Now, in John's day, there was a *church* in Philadelphia. And Jesus had good things to say. Take a look. V7.

Intro

[7] "*And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia* [the pastor; representing the church] *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.* Jesus is *holy*, in that he's set apart and righteous. And he's *true*, as in genuine and full of integrity; the real deal.

And he *has the key of David*. He has the power and authority, *the key*, to admit or exclude people from the promised Davidic kingdom; the kingdom of God. Like a doorman holds the key to a mansion. Or a ruler holds the key to a city. Or a shepherd holds the key to a sheepfold.

But it's not just any key, any authority. It's *the key of David*. Prophesied all the way back in 2 Sam 7. When God told David, "*I will raise up your offspring after you . . . and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son.*" Making it God's kingdom as well. 2 Sam 7:13. God promised David an eternal kingdom, ruled by his son.

And a thousand years later, he *sent* his Son in the *line* of David, to secure it. Saying in Mark 1:15 – *The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand*. The kingdom God promised to David. His rule and reign, first over the Israelites, then the church, and eventually the world. The point being, Jesus is the gatekeeper. He holds *the key*.

And no one can stop him or overrule him. No one can take that power and authority away. V7 again – I'm the one *who has the key of David* [Jesus says], *who opens and no one will shut*. Opens what? The door to God's kingdom; the Davidic kingdom. The realm of his rule and reign, as Lord of all. He's the one who *opens* it, and no one can shut. He's sovereign.

And, he's the one *who shuts and no one opens*; the last phrase. He's the one who *closes* the door to God's kingdom; *prevents* people from entering. There will be a day. He has the authority. He has the power. The power to admit people, and the power to exclude people.

What an introduction. What a preface. What a commentary on the sovereignty of Jesus, over the kingdom of God. Holy and true.

➤ Then, in v8, he repeats a familiar statement. "*I know your works*. The same thing he said to the churches in Sardis, and Thyatira, and Ephesus. And the same thing he'll say to the church in Laodicea. You think he's trying to tell us something? God knows. God knows what we do and what we don't do. Good, bad, *and* ugly. Nothing is hidden. Individually *or* corporately.

[8] *I know your works* [he said]. *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.*

They kept the faith. Believing and doing what Jesus says. A good church for sure. And another characteristic worthy of our imitation.

A good church believes and does what Jesus says (v8)

They don't just pay lip service to it, they actually do it. Last part of v8 – *You have kept my word*, Jesus says. "You've adhered to the information and instruction in this book. All of it." The Word of Christ, inspired by his Spirit. They kept it.

Because that's what good churches do. They continue in a present state of belief and application.

Belief, that Jesus is God in the flesh, and what he says is true and important. Good churches *start* with that belief, and *continue* in it. They believe in him, and they believe in his word.

And, they apply it. They continue in a present state of *application*. Actually *doing* what Jesus says. Otherwise they're hearers only. Unfazed and unchanged by his words.

To *keep* Jesus' word, to *keep* the information and instruction found in this book, is to believe it and do it. Resulting in a *good* church instead of a bad one. A *real* church instead of a fake one. A church that takes advantage of kingdom opportunities. Or as Jesus said it, open doors. That's *part* of the application he highlights.

A good church believes and does what Jesus says . . .

• To take advantage of open doors

V8 again. *Behold, I have set before you an open door*. A golden opportunity. And they were taking advantage of it. *I know your works*, he said. You've *kept* my word. That's the implication. He's commending them.

And, he's reminding them. Reminding them that the door of opportunity is still open. *I have set before you an open door*.

And notice, his statement is preceded by the word *behold*. Do you see it? It's the first of *three* beholds in this passage. A word of emphasis that means something like, "Pay careful attention to what follows! This is important!" So we do.

But the question, is what door Jesus has in *mind* when he says – *I have set before you an open door*. And while we can't be *absolutely* sure, there are at least 3 good possibilities. And it may be that *all* of them are intended.

➤ Starting with **the doors of heaven**. *I have set before you an open door*, of heaven. A door of salvation. A door to the kingdom of God. That not only fits his overall desire to save our soul and *welcome* us to heaven; but the very next phrase as well. *I have set before you an open door, which no one is able to shut*. I’ve opened the doors of heaven for you, Jesus says, and nobody but me can close them.

And good churches not only believe it, they race to get there. Especially given the description in chapters 21-22. A new heaven, a new earth, and a new city of indescribable beauty. Complete with the throne of God, the river of life, and perfect peace. Good churches *yearn* to take advantage of that. *Yearn* to walk through the pearly gates.

➤ Second, good churches take advantage of **doors of opportunity**. A second possibility. Like the Apostle Paul said in 1 Cor 16:9 – *A wide door for effective work has opened to me*. A door of opportunity; opportunity for ministry. Because that’s what Jesus does for people who keep his word.

And *good* churches take advantage of it. They share the Gospel, they invite people to church, they disciple the saints, and they serve in ministry. Ushering as many people through the doors of heaven as they can, by taking advantage of doors of opportunity.

And then last, a third possibility, are **doors of outreach**. To spread the word *outside* our community. *Beyond* our city. A shoe-in for the church in Philadelphia, because it was known as “the gateway to the East.” (**Map**)

If you were coming from the west, from Ephesus or Corinth or Rome; you traveled through Philadelphia in order to go east; to the central plateau of Asia Minor. It was an open door to spread the word. All they had to do was go.

And they probably did, because that’s what good churches do. They take advantage of doors of outreach.

➤ Praise God we’ve done that. And we’re doing it. We’ve planted churches beyond our community, and we’re sending missionaries beyond our border. But if we’re going to continue, if we’re going to take advantage of open doors in the future, more and more people need to step up and get ready. Men *and* women. More and more need to prepare themselves to serve, go, and lead. Especially men. Because men are God’s *primary* leaders in the church.

Not that *every* man is called to full-time ministry. But that the ones who are, or those of you who might be, need to confirm it and get going. Starting with your education and training. A process that takes years.

And the end result could be a *variety* of situations. You may end up a pastor in *our* church. A pastor in *another* church. You might *lead* a church; one that’s already in existence. You might *plant* a church. Or you might become a *missionary*; starting or spreading the church in a cross-cultural setting.

Whatever the case, the doors of outreach are open. But the laborers are few. And we need more men.

If that’s you, we’d love to talk with you. And help you *discern* God’s call. Or lack thereof. We’d love to point you in the right direction for your *education*; and preparation.

If you’re called, or think you are, talk to one of our pastors. Because one of the marks of a good church, is that it believes and does what Jesus says, to take advantage of open doors.

Second, a good church believes and does what Jesus says . . .

• **Despite the pressure to deny him**

V8b – *You have kept my word* [Jesus says] *and have not denied my name*. They didn’t *deny* that they followed Jesus. They didn’t shrink back. And they certainly didn’t *deconstruct* their faith.

Have you heard that expression these days? It’s the latest euphemism for rebellion, denial, and unbelief; while blaming it on others. “I’m a victim because church is bad and somebody looked at me cross-eyed, so I’m done. I’m deconstructing my faith.”

Don’t go there. No matter *what* the pressure. Internal *or* external. If we’re ashamed of Jesus before men, he’ll be ashamed of us before the Father. If we deny his body, the church; we deny him.

➤ *Closer* to home, and far *more* prevalent I think, are *soft* denials. Failing to speak up when you should. Failing to do what’s right in the presence of your peers. Failing to take a stand for fear of being canceled. Failing to name his name when you have the opportunity. Paying lip service to Jesus, but not really living for him. All *soft* denials, but denials nonetheless. And good churches don’t go there.

Last, good churches believe and do what Jesus says . . .

• **Despite their weakness**

Their lack of power against all odds. V8 again – *I know that you have little power, and yet you have kept my word*. Little power compared to their surrounding culture; and domineering government. Little power in the face of disease and pandemics. Little power in the midst of war. They were weak. And yet they kept believing and doing. Holding fast and obeying.

➤ For a present day example, look no further than the church in Ukraine. A part of which is Vertical Bible Church Kyiv, led by **Pastor Alex**. Who, along with his family and *21 other families* in their church, have chosen to *remain* in Kyiv. Serving any way they can, and praying that people give their lives to Christ. That’s the *prayer* request we’re getting. Not for safety, or food, or basic necessities; all of which they desperately need. But salvation.

Look at what Alex said a few days ago:

“Let us pray that Ukrainian people in such difficult circumstances make this important step – give their hearts to Jesus as the Savior, gaining the eternal life first, and then – the peaceful life here on Earth.” (Alex Tarasov, March 2022)

Despite their weakness, they continue to believe and do what Jesus says.

And then there’s another church in our Collective, called **M28**, located in Bucharest, Romania; *bordering* Ukraine. They have 40 families in their church, who go to the central train station every day, to invite refugees into their *homes*.

And the church in *Cluj*, Romania is providing overnight shelter in their building. And the church in **Braila, Romania** is receiving orphans. They already run a certified orphanage, and orphans are already coming out of Ukraine.

➤ And then last, is the communication from **Marius Mezin**. He’s the pastor and leader of GCC Eastern Europe, and tells of a brand new church right on the *border* of Ukraine, with about 15 believers. And on Sunday, February 20th, 4 days before the invasion, that church finished some repairs on their building, and prayed that God would fill it with people.

Listen to what Marius wrote:

“The pastor told me with tears in his eyes: ‘We didn’t want for God to answer the way he did, but our building has every day 40 to 50 refugees we host and feed.’ The community of their little village organized to bring food every day and do laundry at the church. This little church is light for that community.”

Despite their weakness and the pressures, they’re believing and doing what Jesus says.

And I’d like to pray for that. For them *and* us. That we will do the same with *our* doors of opportunity. In the face of *our* pressures, and *our* weakness. Let’s bow our heads.

For Prayer

We’ve heard a lot this morning. So let’s start by quieting our hearts, and letting the Lord confirm it.

(Prayer time)

Now let’s thank God. In the quietness of your own heart. Thank him for what he impressed on you. You might finish the sentence – **“Lord, thank you for . . .”** Thank you for, convicting me. Thank you for, spurring me on. Thank you for, changing my heart.

(Prayer time)

Now let’s take a minute to affirm any commitments you need to make. Finish the sentence, **“Lord, I commit to . . .”** I commit to your call on my life. I commit to stand firm. I commit to love my neighbor.

(Prayer time)

And last, let’s pray for the church in Ukraine. **“Lord, help them to . . .”** You finish it. Lord, help them to persevere. Help them survive. Help them shine.

(Prayer time)

Prayer – Father, draw near to the church in Ukraine. Comfort them, strengthen them, and protect them. And above all God, use them. Use them to save souls and save lives. Use them to meet needs and love their neighbors. Use them to tear down walls and build your church. And use *us*, Lord. Lead *us*. Strengthen us. To believe and do what you say in *our* country. Have thine own way, we pray. Have thine own way.

Close

Talk – If you’d like to talk or pray with someone . . .

If you’d like to connect with one of our elders/deacons . . .

Guest Central – If you’re new to our church, don’t forget about Guest Central.

Easter Invitations – Take advantage of opportunities to invite someone to Easter services. It’s an open door, and they’re available in small packets throughout the lobby.

You Are Loved