

Philadelphia and the Key of David

SPEAKER	Matt Ryniker
DATE	Sunday, October 8, 2023
PASSAGES	Revelation 3:7-13; Isaiah 22:15-25; Revelation 1:17-18; Deuteronomy 30:6; Romans 2:28-29; Galatians 6:14-16; 2 Chronicles 6:32-33; Isaiah 49:22-23; Isaiah 60:14; Ezekiel 8:14
MESSAGE	Begins at 0:55:27 in the service

THE BIG IDEA

The Christians in Philadelphia had been put out of their synagogue and told, publicly, that they were wrong about the thing most central to them. Jesus does not answer with encouragement to try harder. He answers by telling them who he is: the holy one, the true one, the one who holds the key of David. Human gatekeepers shut a door; he opens one no one can shut.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- ◆ Jesus describes himself differently in each letter, and the description always carries the letter's point. If the key of David means nothing to you, this letter will read like religious noise.
- ◆ Philadelphia and Smyrna are the only two churches Jesus does not rebuke. He notes their weakness without scolding them for it: "I know that you have but little power, and yet you have kept my word."
- ◆ The open door here is most likely not a ministry opportunity. It is a place to belong, offered to people who have just had a door slammed on them.
- ◆ Who counts as a true Jew was a live wound in the first-century church, and Scripture answers it the same way twice: circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit.
- ◆ The key of David comes from Isaiah 22, where God strips a self-important steward of his office and hands the authority to someone else. Jesus is claiming that office.
- ◆ Israel was never the home team. Israel's God was. The nations bowing is not a reversal of the plan; it is the plan.

- ◆ Early Christians were not made of sturdier material than we are. They were confused, frightened people who had somewhere to look.
- ◆ Faithfulness under that kind of pressure runs on one fuel: a view of Jesus glorious enough to be worth the cost.

► 1:14:54

Matt has been working through Revelation letter by letter and then theme by theme, and he restated why: the book exists to keep Christians faithful whatever their circumstances, and the engine driving that is not encouragement but a deeper and more glorious revelation of Jesus. “Not a more enthusiastic *you can do it*,” he said, “but an *isn’t he glorious* kind of thing.” This week: Philadelphia, and the key of David.

1. A letter that reads like religious noise until you know one thing

► 1:16:38

“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.”

REVELATION 3:7 ↗

Earlier in the book Jesus holds a different set of keys — “I have the keys of Death and Hades” — and that one explains itself: he died, he conquered death, he can let you out. But why is there a key for *David*? Matt was candid that this is where a lot of Bible reading goes: you finish the page and realize you have no idea what you just read. He admitted doing exactly that with Galatians once, as a college minister, and having to read the whole letter out loud to get anything out of it.

► 1:21:02

Two things are unusual about this letter. It contains no rebuke — only here and at Smyrna does Jesus have nothing to correct. And what he commends is not influence. “I know that you have but little power, and yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name” (Revelation 3:8). He does not ask what happened to them.

2. “They say that they are Jews and are not”

► 1:22:16

Satan is a Hebrew word for adversary, and the synagogue in Philadelphia had evidently become one. But notice what the fight is about: not doctrine in the abstract, but identity. Do we belong to the true God. Are we following him properly. Does he actually love us.

► 1:23:58

Synagogue leadership could excommunicate, and Matt asked the room to sit with what that would have been. Not merely losing a building. It came with a message: you are wrong about the thing most core to you, you are unfaithful to the God of Israel, we pray for your souls, you are cut off. Against that, every promise in the letter lands: you will be a pillar in the temple of my God, a permanent fixture, and *never shall he go out of it*; I will write on you my God's name, and the name of the city, and my own new name (Revelation 3:12).

► 1:24:27

Which reframes the open door. Paul uses that image for ministry opportunity, but Matt leaned the other way here, because the surrounding comfort is all about place and permanence. They had the door shut on them. Jesus says: I open doors, and when I open one, nobody shuts it.

3. So who is a true Jew?

► 1:25:19

The answer is older than the argument. Deuteronomy 30:6 promises that God himself will circumcise the heart of his people and their offspring so that they love him with all their heart and soul — “so much,” Matt said, “for the Old Testament being just a bunch of rules and the New Testament being all about love.” And Ruth, a Moabite, is not only welcomed but becomes David's own ancestor, which settles the question of genetic heritage before Paul ever raises it.

► 1:26:25

“For no one is a Jew who is merely one outwardly, nor is circumcision outward and physical. But a Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter. His praise is not from man but from God.”

ROMANS 2:28–29 ↗

► 1:28:05

Paul had every credential available and boasted in none of them — “neither circumcision counts for anything nor uncircumcision, but a new creation”. That the same theme runs through Romans and through this letter tells you how widely the wound was felt.

4. Shebna, Eliakim, and the key

► 1:29:21

The phrase comes from a story Matt confessed he had read past more than once. Shebna is steward over the household in Jerusalem — Matt’s handle for him was the oily steward of Gondor, acting like a king he isn’t — and he has cut himself a tomb up on the height among the royal graves. God’s answer through Isaiah is not gentle: you are not a pharaoh, and you will be hurled away like a ball into a wide land and buried out in the grass with everybody else ([Isaiah 22:15–19](#)). “I don’t preach like that,” Matt said. “I just think — how would you feel if you were the prophet and that was what you had to say?”

► 1:31:24

“In that day I will call my servant Eliakim the son of Hilkiah, and I will clothe him with your robe, and will bind your sash on him, and will commit your authority to his hand... And I will place on his shoulder the key of the house of David. He shall open, and none shall shut; and he shall shut, and none shall open.”

ISAIAH 22:20–22 ↗

► 1:33:05

A man who claims authority over God’s people and is unfaithful with it gets cut down, and the key goes to the one God chooses. The keyholder decides who comes and who goes, and he is a father to the people rather than a boss over them. To a congregation just excluded by men holding exactly that kind of office, this is the comfort: the stewards who shut the door on you were never the ones holding the key.

5. What Israel was actually for

► 1:34:52

Before the strange promise about the synagogue bowing, Matt named a habit of reading that he says will wreck you — assuming that Israel is always and everywhere the home team. Israel’s *God* is the home team. It sounds like a small correction and it is not: it is the difference between reading for a nation’s dominance and reading for God’s purpose.

► 1:35:51

“Likewise, when a foreigner, who is not of your people Israel, comes from a far country for the sake of your great name... hear from heaven your dwelling place and do according to all for which the foreigner calls to you, in order that all the peoples of the earth may know your name and fear you.”

2 CHRONICLES 6:32–33 ↗

That is the mission statement, prayed by Solomon at the temple’s dedication — and almost immediately a queen arrives from far away and says how great your God must be to give a king like you. Not military hegemony. A radio tower, as Matt put it, broadcasting to people God already wanted.

▶ 1:39:17

The prophets keep the same picture. [Isaiah 45:14](#) has the wealth of Egypt and the men of stature coming to say surely God is in you and there is no other. [Isaiah 49:22–23](#) has kings as foster fathers and queens as nursing mothers, bowing — and the point of it stated outright: *they will know that I am the Lord.*

“The sons of those who afflicted you shall come bending low to you, and all who despised you shall bow down at your feet; they shall call you the City of the Lord, the Zion of the Holy One of Israel.”

ISAIAH 60:14 ↗

Read carelessly, that sounds like scores being settled. Read as Isaiah wrote it, the bowing is the surrender of antagonism — the moment the nations stop despising and acknowledge the true God. The people who afflicted you got the invitation too.

6. Not a switcheroo — the same plan

▶ 1:41:33

So when Jesus tells a powerless church that he will make their opponents come and bow at their feet and learn that he loved them, he is quoting the oldest promise in the file. “There’s no switcheroo,” Matt said. “It’s plan A. It has always been that people who don’t know the living God would come to those who serve him truly and acknowledge that he’s the true living God. Jesus is saying — that’s me.”

▶ 1:43:01

And Jesus preferred that they stay faithful even at the cost of powerless exclusion — which is a hard preference, because the need to belong is not a weakness. You need shelter. You need family. That need

can also be leveraged. “Jesus is saying: I am the actual gatekeeper. If people exclude you, that’s their little door they shut. I’m the door shutter. And if someone offers you a little tempting open door over here — I’m the door opener.”

7. Where would you break?

► 1:44:48

Here Matt did something deliberately uncomfortable, because he wanted the room to feel the clamp rather than admire it from a distance. We picture the early church as a different species — white beards, unshakable faith, glowing when they prayed. “If I know anything about psychology or history,” he said, “it’s that people are people, and we’re screwy. We’ve always been screwy.”

So: a meeting you are called into. HR, your managing director, her boss, the CEO, the VP over DEI, everything recorded. You are the only one not doing the thing after the inclusivity meeting, and they already know why, because Jenny from legal is a Christian and she does it and says it is the Christian thing to do. It is a small thing. You are the one making it big. And you have children to feed. Matt paused the scenario to be clear where he stands and where the church doesn’t: he thinks the movement is wicked, he prays with real sympathy for people caught up in it, and no person is the enemy.

► 1:47:31

He ran the same pressure through an older example. Ezekiel finds women at the temple gate weeping for Tammuz. Picture the Israelite woman among her friends on the day of mourning, crying a little because everyone is crying and she has had a rough morning anyway — and then explaining to her Israelite friend that it is only allergies. Playing both sides is not a modern invention.

► 1:53:49

Then he closed the exits one at a time. At least you would still have this church, the playground, people who would cover the rent. Then: what if the board and I called you up front, in front of everyone, and said you don’t belong to us anymore. What would you have? Debt, fear, vulnerable children, and nights you could not sleep. First-century Christians were called atheists because they had no image to worship, then cannibals because they ate the flesh of the Lord, then worse as gossip ran. Don’t rent to them. Don’t do business with them. You can steal from them; the police will not help.

8. The only thing that carries that weight

► 1:54:25

Some capitulated. Some did not. The difference was not that the ones who held were inherently stronger, and the letter says so — what Jesus gives them is not a pep talk but himself, holy and true, holding the key. “If it’s not all about him being worth it, it’s not going to work,” Matt said, “because the price was way harder than you could imagine.”

► 1:58:58

He ended where the letter ends, and pointed it outward — brothers and sisters in other countries living this now, where the shame costs more than the money: no job, no marriages for your children, scavenging. To them, and to Philadelphia, the same words. I know you have little power. You have kept my word and not denied my name. One day I will show the world that I loved you, and you will have a permanent place in my house, and I will write my name on you. He prayed that God would fill us with the vision of himself being worth it.

FOR FURTHER STUDY**SCRIPTURE IN THIS MESSAGE**

- Revelation 3:7
- Revelation 1:17–18
- Revelation 3:8
- Revelation 3:12
- Deuteronomy 30:6
- Romans 2:28–29
- Galatians 6:14–16
- Isaiah 22:15–19
- Isaiah 22:20–22
- 2 Chronicles 6:32–33
- Isaiah 45:14
- Isaiah 49:22–23
- Isaiah 60:14
- Ezekiel 8:14

FOR YOUR HOPE GROUP

1. Jesus commends a church with little power and no influence in its city. What would it change about how you measure your own faithfulness if that were the only scorecard?
2. Matt suggested the open door is belonging, not opportunity. Where have you had a door shut on you, and what would it mean to hear that Jesus holds the key to that one?
3. Reading Israel as the home team rather than Israel's God as the home team — where have you caught yourself doing that, and what did it do to how you read the passage?
4. The Tammuz story is about weeping just enough to stay in the room. What is the small, deniable version of that in your life right now?
5. Matt said only a view of Jesus glorious enough to be worth it will hold under pressure. What is one thing you will do this week to get that view rather than wish for it?

ABOUT THE SPEAKER

Matt Ryniker is Hope Chapel's senior pastor — his own description of the job — and reports to the church's governing board, who he cheerfully calls his boss. He and his wife Mandy have been held up from Hope's own pulpit as an example to the congregation. He spent a stretch of his working life as a public school teacher, and he still teaches the parent dedication classes where families commit to raising their children to follow Jesus — a theme that runs straight into this message.

Watch the full message:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i05BVfuxRy0&t=3327s>

These notes summarise a message preached at Hope Chapel in Austin, Texas. They are a reader's aid, not a transcript — scripture references link to the full passage so you can read it in context.