

Revelation

Seven letters to the seven Churches:

**God's Message to the Church at
Philadelphia**

**Jesus, Name above all
Names**

Robert Weston

Ruach Breath of Life Ministries

Spring Cluster Course WEEK 5

JESUS, NAME ABOVE ALL NAMES

REVELATION 3:7-22: THE CHURCH AT PHILADELPHIA

As we commit all that we do to the Lord, we find that the name of the Lord is a strong tower. The righteous run into it and are safe.

Supplies List:

1 or 2 lay readers (male, female) to partner in the teaching time
3 copies of colour-coded notes (for leader and volunteer readers)
Bible
Handouts: Biblical Names for God,
Map
Enough blank paper and pens for two 'INTO THE HEART' activities

Note: Choose your readers earlier in the week and email them the notes in advance so that they can read them aloud. This will enhance the joint presentation during the meeting.

***VISUAL FOCAL POINT:** Use a white board, flip chart or have someone create a large poster or collage that lists names of God, along with corresponding Scripture references. You will already be familiar with many of the names, and you can find still more on the web sites below. Pray about which ones to include for your group.

For examples, see

<http://christeternalchristianchurch.com/learningactivity22.htm> and
<http://psalmsinger.com/biblicalnames.html>

It is also precious to brush up on the Hebrew names for God:

Jehovah Rohi, my Healer,

Jehovah Sabaot, the Sovereign Lord of Hosts,

Jehovah M'kaddesh, Who sanctifies,

Jehovah Nissi, the Lord who is my Banner

Jehovah Shalom, the Lord who is my Peace

Jehovah Elohim, the Lord who is my Life.

Jehovah Jireh, the Lord who is my Provider.

If your group enjoys singing, open with a song that is relevant to the day's lesson, such as "El Shaddai," or "Jesus, Name above All Names."

INTRODUCTION

We have seen that Pergamum, Ephesus and Smyrna were not tin pot shanty towns but the principal and most influential cities in Asia. Each had immense civic pride and there was doubtless fierce rivalry between themselves as they competed for the equivalent of the Olympic Games. They were also top contenders for 'Business City of the Decade!'

In today's session we will toggle between a "background check" on Philadelphia and explore how each fact that we examine lends itself to a corresponding spiritual truth.

Have someone read Revelation 3:7-22 aloud.

INTO THE PRESENT VIA THE PAST

A: Geographically Philadelphia was a border town located in a broad valley which included the city of Sardis and extended down to the Aegean Sea, near Smyrna. As a gateway city, Philadelphia commanded one of the greatest highways in the ancient world, a teeming thoroughfare that linked Europe with the East. Located clockwise from Ephesus, and 28 miles southeast of Sardis, Philadelphia was a missionary city: it existed to spread the Greek and Roman way of life throughout the wild regions beyond to the east.

B: It is fitting that the Risen Christ said, 'Behold I set before you an open door.' The door of opportunity He meant, of course, was but to spread the Gospel of Christ.

A: Philadelphia lay on the edge of a great volcanic area, fertile and well suited for vineyards. Renowned for its wines and hot springs, the city was also a centre for health and healing with its medicinal waters – as it still is today. There was also a downside: earthquakes. After the quake of AD17, the survivors, grateful to the Emperor Tiberius for the large grant they received, renamed their home the ‘New Town of Caesar.’

B: The ongoing promise of the Risen Christ to his faithful servants reads: “I will write my new name upon [them].” Philadelphia’s new name, NeoCaesarea, didn’t last; it was replaced when its citizens later reverted to calling their home by its original name: Philadelphia. In contrast, the new name of Jesus Christ was bestowed upon those who loved Him – a name that would endure beyond time.

A: The people of Philadelphia lived unsettled and fearful lives. Whenever the earth erupted – and it often did – the population fled to the open countryside, dodging crashing trees and falling masonry. In their fear they resigned themselves to this exhausting and seemingly unending rhythm: to and fro-ing, escaping, returning.

B: The promise of the Risen Christ to His faithful servant is, ‘He shall go out no more’ (3:12). this is a promise of safety. It is as if the Risen Christ said to the people of Philadelphia, I can rid you of your fears and terrors; I can rid you of your nervous uncertainties; I can give you security that will keep you safe in life and in death.

Notice that it was not protection from death that the Risen Christ offered; it was deliverance from the *fear* of death. All our days the fear of life and the fear of death drive us to seek some kind of security. The safety that Jesus Christ offered then, to those who lived their lives for Him, can also be ours today.

A: **Architecturally** many temples graced Philadelphia. Picture a mini Athens. When a man had served the State well, the city fathers erected a pillar inscribed with his name in one of the temples as a memorial, so that all who came to worship might see and remember him.

B: In a marvelous spiritual parallel, the Risen Christ promises to the man who overcomes, “I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God”

(3:12). Not in any heathen temple, but in the very house and family of God will the name of every man, woman, and child who is faithful to God be forever inscribed.

A: The message of the Risen Christ came to the people of Philadelphia in languages and in pictures they could understand.

B: God, ever-creative, capitalized on the city's history and culture, those things that occurred in everyday life and the common civic practices which all men knew; and out of these earthly things He forged His heavenly message.

A: The letter to Philadelphia is a unique example of how to use the “here and now” to beget the there and then. The letter is one of undiluted praise. It would appear that the congregation at Philadelphia was a fairly small one which had not yet made a major impact on the city. Jesus recognises that they have little power but have been faithful in keeping His word and not denying His name.

The Jewish population in Philadelphia was convinced that by virtue of their ‘national identity and religious heritage’ it was the People of God . . . By their slander and persecution of Christians, however, they showed themselves to be the Synagogue of Satan. As Jesus said to the hostile, unbelieving Jews, ‘You are of your father, the devil’ (John 8:44 and Mounce, p.118).

B. When Islam swept across Asia Minor, Philadelphia stood as the last bastion of Christianity. When it fell, it was only because it was betrayed by its fellow Christians of Byzantium, who envied its honour.

Through it all, Philadelphia was the town which kept the faith!

INTO THE WORD

3:7 Keys. Jesus is called ‘He that is true.’ Jesus is the only person who is both real and genuine. Everything else is delusory and unreal (insincere) in comparison with Him. Secondly, He is called ‘He that has

the key of David, He that opens what no man can shut and shuts what no man can open,' illustrating Isaiah 22:22. Jesus is the steward of God; He is the one person who is able to introduce us to the presence and the riches of God.

What does the phrase having the 'Key of David' imply? 'Complete control over the royal household – the undisputed authority to admit . . . from the new Jerusalem' (Mounce, p.116).

Why should Jesus give us the key to His Kingdom? I used to do surveys amongst British holiday makers in Spain. On the rare occasions when they were able to walk in a straight line, we asked them why God should let them into Heaven. Their reply was usually something to the effect that they led good, upright lives – and were much better than “that hypocrite” down the road who went to Church! In other words, their answer was about themselves – not about what Christ has done for them.

Hold the thought of Jesus being the key. It is so easy to assume it is our boss or spouse or somebody else who holds the key for us. Refocus your gaze onto Jesus who holds the true key to your life. You may feel that you have very little strength / skill / wisdom and so on, but don't let your feelings of inadequacy hold you back from taking on the opportunities God opens up for you.

Jesus alone holds the keys of death and Hades and will cast them into the Lake of Fire (Rev. 20:11-15). This will represent the death of death itself (1 Cor. 15) (Scotty Smith). All visions are by definition only partial in this world, but the Lord is giving us here the reassurance that history is moving towards God's intended finale.

What does Jesus want from His church? What can we learn about His purpose, passion and His priorities for His people as they seek to live for His glory? What is to distinguish the church from every other human institution?

We could say God had placed her in a key position to impact their culture. 'What He opens no one can shut, and what He shuts, no one can open' (3:7). This is a wonderful example of how much God can achieve through so little. Scripture is full of such paradoxes. The first shall be last. Those

who lose their lives for His sake will find it. It is out of weakness that God ordains strength, deliberately choosing the weak in order to shame the strong. Jesus promises that He will make those who persecute believers to come and fall down at their feet and acknowledge that He has loved them (3:9). This is an extraordinary promise of vindication.

3:8 Open doors. There is great wealth of meaning in the phrase ‘Behold, I have set before you an open door that no man can shut.’ Every one of us has missionary opportunity, wherever we are. We can be a missionary at our place of work, at school and at home, in our neighbourhoods, and in groups and clubs we belong to. We have to walk through the doors that He opens for us, even though there are usually plenty of both internal and external reasons to feel that we cannot. In 1980, when the leadership at a huge conference passed over the opportunity to pray for the nation, the Lord told me that within a year I would be leading my own conference. It seemed improbable, but the following morning someone came to my tent and told me that the Lord had told him that this time next year I would be leading my own conference. I felt much too young and inexperienced, but God opened up the way and blessed it hugely.

Earlier in the New Testament Paul writes to the Corinthians of his plans to stay in Ephesus ‘for a wide door for effective work has opened to me’ (1 Cor. 16:9 – cf 2 Cor. 2:12 and Col. 4:3). Even if the door to the synagogue has been closed, the door to the Messianic kingdom remains wide open. Paul uses the metaphor of the Open Door to signify the great opportunity for missionary work. But there’s yet another facet to the image.

In Philadelphia there were many Jews who had converted and would have undoubtedly experienced being shut out from their own family and synagogue circles. It is as though the Lord were also saying, ‘Men may shut you out, but the door to fellowship with Me can never be closed by any man.’

What are we doing to get to know the Lord better, to take time to study, either on our own or in a group, to widen our minds and to broaden our knowledge so that we are better equipped to love and God and one another? **(Could pose this as a rhetorical question now, or break into small groups briefly to discuss later on, then pray for each other.)**

Jesus Himself said, “I am the door” (John 10: 7-9). In olden days there was no gate or door across the sheepfold entrance, simply an opening in the wall through which the animals passed, the shepherd himself lying down across the opening at night. No one could get in except over him. The shepherd, in other words, *was* the door. It is through Jesus the Shepherd that we enter into the presence of God.

3:10 Here the Risen Christ promises that in the great day of trial He will keep those who have kept faith in Him. Is He promising deliverance from the period of trial, or safe-keeping through it? It is because the Church was faithful to Christ in time of trial that He himself will be faithful to them when they pass through times of great trial. This links with Jesus’ teaching in John 17:15: ‘I do not pray that You will take them out of the world but that You will keep them from the evil one.’

The martyrs of Revelation 6:9-11, for example, are told to wait until the full number of those who are destined to be killed have been gathered in. Clearly, a time of extreme testing and tribulation precedes the establishment of the eternal Kingdom (Daniel 2, Mark 13:19 and 2 Thess. 2: 1-12, cf Revelation 13:5-10), yet Jesus tells the church at Philadelphia that He will “ward off all the assaults of Satan on them” (Mounce).

This included more subtle schemes as well. Take the modern example of athlete Eric Liddell, who refused to run in the Olympic Games’ 100 metres race, for which he had trained so hard in 1924. He declined his chance at a medal when he learned that the preliminary heats were held on a Sunday. When he was offered the chance to run in the 400 metres, an unknown man slipped a piece of paper into his hands. Liddell opened it and read it: ‘Those who honour Me I will honour’ (Sam 2:30). That day, Eric Liddell achieved the world record for the 400 metres race. Perhaps the words on that slip of paper gave Liddell the extra strength to run as he had never run before. Jesus Christ never fails one who honours Him!

Verse 10 also hints prophetically at the testing which is to come upon the whole world, a terrible day of judgement, which will separate the good from the bad and utterly destroy things.

There is danger implicit in Christ’s comment that He will “come” to the church at Ephesus, Pergamum and Sardis. When He comes to Philadel-

phia, however, it will be to ensure their safe- keeping through the time of trial ‘and establish them as permanent citizens of the Kingdom of God’ (Mounce).

3:11 It is those who have been faithful who will stand the test and will win the reward for that faithfulness – and no man will take their crown. This reference to crowns speaks of the wreath awarded to the winner of an athletic contest. This is especially appropriate as Philadelphia was known for its games and festivals. The meaning is clear if we paraphrase the verse: “See that you do not forfeit your crown.” No one can ever take our crown from us, but by our own weakness or infidelity we ourselves can lose it.

3:12 We have considered the names being written on pillars in the temples. The purpose of the pillar is to support the edifice of which it forms a part. If we give all our strength, thought, time and substance for the up-building of the people of Christ, then we too are supports and pillars of His Church. Some people desire only that the Church should support them; they want something out of it. But the Church can never fully support us until we have given all our support to the it. In other words, we can only get out of the Church what we bring to it.

The Lord has equipped us far more, and for more, than we realise. It is time to take on the challenge of the responsibilities that He places before us. Billy Graham’s daughter, Ann, is a hugely influential Bible teacher ministering to large numbers of people, but for the first two months when she first began to teach Bible class she was physically sick before each lecture she gave. It was only her love and fear of the Lord that kept her going. She continues to feel inadequate about many things to this day, but over and again she has seen how faithful and true the Lord is. We can’t but He can!

Concerning the promise, “He shall no more go out . . .” (3:12), we have already referred to this as a reference to the flight from a city when earthquakes threaten. Remember the old sailors’ adage? When facing a storm there is only one thing to do: keep facing it. This is also a recipe for the Christian life. As to the new name that will be written on us – the Christian is like a coin. Coinage is a sign of Kingship; the name is the sign

of ownership and we have the owner's name stamped on us. May our lives help people to see that we belong to God.

INTO THE HEART

***Option 1:** (You may not have time to do this in the meeting, so why not do it in your personal devotional time?) Take some time to pray quietly and have a go at answering this question on paper. What is your current spiritual name in Christ? Would He call you a restorer of hope? A lifter of heads? A bringer of peace? A songbird in the house of the Lord? In your personal devotional time, ask Him for an 'umbrella phrase' that describes the way He uses and is leading you.

***Option 2:** Distribute the handout listing various names for God and ask cluster members to call out others that occur to them so they can be added. Then have each member circle the name they are most drawn to in the moment. Play meditative music in the background and invite them to reflect on three things:

- **why this name draws them. If it triggers a memory, have them describe it.**
- **what they would like to better understand about this facet of God**
- **three steps they could take this month to position themselves to more fully understand and experience that facet of God's nature**

***Option 3:** If time allows, break up into groups of 2 or 3, share what you've written (optional, of course) and pray for each other.

Throughout Church history small dedicated groups have moved mountains. Can you think of some in that category?

No one denies that it is hard to reach British society -- but there are ways into it. In Brixton, Christians were as keen as anyone else for the litter (and youths) to be off the street. When they started "praise and litter marches", however, they had wonderful encounters with people -- and many were brought into the Kingdom. As Mike Breen, their pastor, put it, 'God showed us an open door and we found a frontier ready to be won.'

Much of my own life has been spent in ‘gateway’ places and cities. Chester, into Wales, Shetland, (into Britain from the north), Jersey (into France and Europe) St Louis (Gateway to the Wild West!) Have you ever thought of Canterbury as a gateway city? In what ways would that be relevant?

Talk of St Louis reminds one of the courageous pioneers who opened up America. We need pioneers in the Church; people with prophetic perception who can see what needs to be done, and can find ways to harness people’s existing or latent gifts to bring it about. But then we also need settlers – people who can build on what has been planted.

Churches that are run by evangelists tend to be unbalanced. It is not healthy to be continually challenged! Churches run by prophets likewise tend to be so much on the edge, that people do not always find the comfort that they need. That is because prophets see what is over the horizon; it is the task of pastors to implement what they and the prophets see in the Spirit at ground level.

Left to themselves, pastors risk going at the pace of the slowest. They are so determined to be all inclusive that they are often too cautious, and fail to bring out the best in those who want to press the accelerator button. By contrast, prophets are always straining to what lies ahead; their insights need to be grounded in the pastorally safe, sensible and above all achievable.

When prophets and pastors work side by side in creative tension, much blessing flows and the church grows. Often, what we feel in our hearts is right, but it may not be the right time to implement it.

We can help each other so much in this respect. Incidentally, if you have been feeling out of step with your fellowship recently, it may be through not understanding this principle. Prophet pioneers are often ahead of the game: they will be weeping when the church is rejoicing, because they are so acutely aware of all that is not yet right or sanctified. Conversely, they will be rejoicing when the church wakes up to these things and repents!

Pioneers and Settlers

Would you see yourself primarily as a pastor or a prophet, a pioneer or a settler? Remember, the Church needs both. Neither one is better than the other. One sows and plants, another waters and reaps.

Mike Breen devised the following exercise, suggesting that you answer the following questions with a score ranging from 10, if you agree strongly, to a 1 if you disagree.

		A	B
1	I enjoy change and do not see it as a threat		
2	I prepare carefully before taking action		
3	I like to ensure that others will come along with me in new endeavours		
4	Being adaptable is my strength		
5	I try to bring everyone with me, even if that means moving more slowly		
6	I become bored if I do the same thing for too long		
7	I like to have an idea of the outcome before I start a project		
8	I find it difficult when people do not immediately respond to fresh insights		
9	I believe that careful planning avoids unnecessary hurt and upset		
10	I like to think through the details before I act		
11	I enjoy the challenge of a new situation		
12	I become impatient with slow decision-making process.		
	Total		

Add questions 1,4, 6, 8, 11 12 in column A to get your pioneering score
(Pioneers are apostolic in the sense of being sent to do something).

Add questions 2,3,5,7,9,10 in column B to get your ‘settler’ score.

All of us have some of the ‘pioneer’ and some of the ‘settler’ in us. The higher of the two scores show which you lean most towards.