



MISSIONAL IN PHILADELPHIA: DIDN'T GIVE UP OR GIVE IN

Part 8 of The Seven

Pastor Mark Driscoll | Rev. 3:7-13 | June 10, 2012

Revelation 3:7-13

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.’”

WHAT DO YOU PAY ATTENTION TO?

What do you pay attention to? Stock market, home values, sports team, band on the road, upcoming movie, favorite video game? Who do you follow online? A lot of what we pay attention to is on our phone, right? Keep it as close as we possibly can. If we tracked your online activity, what do you really pay attention to? It reveals a lot about who we love, what we love, what we're into, what we're not into.

I had a funny occurrence some years ago. I was talking to a great Bible teacher named R. C. Sproul. He's an elderly gentleman. And I asked him, “So what's it like to have so many people download you on iTunes?” He said, “I what?” Never even heard of iTunes. I said, “Well, they subscribe to your podcast.” “Pod what? Never heard of it.” I said, “Well, haven't you been on the Internet?” He said, “I've never been on the Internet.” I said, “Really? Do you even have a phone?” He said, “Well, my grandson bought me a phone and I do use it.” I said, “Well, what do you use it for?” He said, “Well, there's a button I hit and it tells me what's going on with the Pittsburgh Steelers.” It's the only information he had ever accessed from the Internet. And the only way he knew how to use his phone was, “If I hit the Steelers button, I get to learn about what's going on with the Pittsburgh Steelers.”

What do you pay attention to? Have you ever wondered or been curious, what's Jesus paying attention to? I mean, he came to the earth on a mission to glorify the Father and to die for sinners. He rose from death after his death in our place on the cross. He ascended back into heaven. Right now Jesus is exalted and enthroned, and he sees and knows all. What's he paying attention to?

So, we open up Revelation 2 and 3, we see that Jesus pays attention to the local church. He cares a lot about the local church. And he, through a pastor named John, a friend of his, he provides us seven letters written to seven churches. And they're not just random churches, they're actually a family of churches, like our fourteen Mars Hill churches. And they're linked and working together on mission for Jesus in various areas. And as Jesus speaks to each of the churches, it's amazing how closely he's paying attention.

Do you pay attention to what's going on at your church? Do you know how it's going, and how to pray, and who's leading, and where the needs are, and how you could be prayerfully, carefully considering your place in the body of Christ? Jesus is paying really close attention to the local churches, so much so that as we read the letters written some two thousand years ago, as John is dictating for us what Jesus is saying to us, Jesus knows who the human leaders are, who the spiritual leaders are. He knows how they're doing theologically. He knows the false teachers that some churches have allowed in. He knows those churches that are struggling and suffering. And he has a very clear, detailed picture of what's going on in the local church.

What do you pay attention to? Well, what Jesus pays attention to is the local church. And he doesn't just write letters to individual Christians because “it's all about a personal relationship with Jesus.” We do want you to have a personal relationship with Jesus. He's someone who's alive and well, and he wants a relationship with you. But he writes instead letters to churches, to the people of God. Not just the individual people of God, but the collective people of God.

As we've looked at it, Jesus sometimes has nothing nice to say. Some of your parents told you, “If you can't say anything nice, don't say anything at all.” Well, Jesus' mother, Mary, never told him that. Because if it's a bad church that doesn't have anything good going on, we've seen in the letters that Jesus provides, he doesn't have anything nice to say.

Other churches, it's a little good, little bad. And he'll say, "Well, here's good and here's bad. And I'm encouraged here but you need to do some course correction there." Today, the church in Philadelphia, he has nothing bad to say about them. Nothing bad to say to them. No criticism whatsoever, only commendation. No correction.

And I get really frustrated because sometimes people will broad-brush churches. There's, let's say, 300,000-plus churches in America. People say, "Oh, the church has gone astray." Three hundred thousand of them? That seems like a bit of a generalization. Or, "The church is strong and growing." Well, not 300,000 of them. You can't make generalizations about churches. You have to look at each local church. So for us at Mars Hill, we look at each of our fourteen local churches, and try to ascertain, like Jesus does, where's it strong? Where's it weak? How would he evaluate it? What can we do for it?

JESUS' WORDS TO THE CHURCH IN PHILADELPHIA

Well, Philadelphia's a great encouragement because it's a church that, again, he has no correction for, only commendation of. And the city of Philadelphia was originally in Turkey, not just the one in the U.S. You may have heard it called the City of Brotherly Love, because the original city of Philadelphia was founded by two brothers who really did care for each other. And so it got the nickname the City of Brotherly Love.

To this day it's one of the most fertile places on the earth for growing raisins. So every time you eat your Raisin Bran in the morning, think of Revelation 3, the church at Philadelphia.

And there are two things I'd say by way of preface. Number one, not all sin is worth mentioning. Do you think that the church in Philadelphia was perfect? That every member gave generously, served vigorously, prayed fervently? No. Do you think they had any problems? I'm sure they did. Anytime you get people, you get problems. But Jesus doesn't mention their failures, their shortcomings, or their sins. Not all sin is worth talking about.

Sometimes people do love God. They are growing in God. There is reason to be encouraged. And though they're not perfect, there's nothing rising to the level of needing to talk about it. Some of you who are always looking for the problem and the sin, you need to learn from Jesus' example. Sometimes there's not sin that rises to the level that it's really worth talking about. They're doing pretty good.

And number two, encouragement is a powerful force. Jesus speaks to the church at Philadelphia and says, "I see what you're doing. I know it's hard. I love you very much. And I'm very proud of you." And here's what happens, they continue for 1,200 years. That's the powerful force of encouragement. If you're a parent, you could speak a word of life to your child that could put wind in their sail for the rest of their life. Jesus provides encouragement to that church, and as he does, I hope he provides encouragement to our church.

So, let's hear what Jesus has to say as he's paying attention to the church at Philadelphia. Revelation 3:7, "And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write," so that's the spiritual leadership that's serving in addition to the human leadership at the church in Philadelphia.

"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 will open." He says, "I know your works." Again, Jesus is paying attention. All you Community Group leaders, Jesus knows what you're doing. Thank you. All you Redemption Group leaders, Jesus knows what you're doing. Thank you.

All of you who show up early to set up, tear down, those of you who stayed late, those who are serving in the kids' ministry, those who are laboring behind the scenes, those who are laboring in a more public way, those who are volunteering time during the week, those who are giving generously, those who are praying for our church, those who are paying attention, those who are sharing their faith, Jesus says what? "I know your works."

And sometimes you don't get a lot of gratefulness and gratitude, but you get it right here from the Lord Jesus Christ. He knows who you are. He knows where you are. He knows what you're doing. He knows how you're giving. He knows how you're praying. He knows how you're serving. He pays attention. Jesus knows not only every hair on your head, he knows every volunteer in our church, and he greatly, and we greatly on his behalf, appreciate that and publicly say, "Thank you."

How encouraging is that? Jesus says, "I know your works." How many of you, you wake up and you feel like, "I don't know if this even matters." Jesus says, "It does." "I don't know if anyone even cares." Jesus says, "I do." And Jesus cares for our church. Jesus cares for our leaders. Jesus cares for our people. Jesus cares for our mission. He says, "I know your works." How amazing is that? It's so encouraging to know that Jesus sees and knows all. And sometimes for some people and churches he doesn't have a criticism or a correction, he has an encouragement and a thank you.

He says, "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. Behold, I will make those of the synagogue of Satan—" that was actually a denomination. I don't think that was their official name, but Jesus has renamed this particular denomination into "synagogue of Satan."

"Who say 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. 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. I am coming soon. Hold fast to what you have, so that no one may seize your crown." That's your rewards for faithful service.

"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, the name of the city of my God," that's the kingdom of heaven, the new Jerusalem, which comes down from my God out of heaven, and my own new name." Here's the big idea, something Jesus says to the churches over and over: "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."

OUR KING IS JESUS

Let's unpack what Jesus says to the church in Philadelphia. The first is that our King is Jesus. Our King is Jesus. Whatever leadership there is on the earth, be it political, be it spiritual, above it all is Jesus. And it says here that he is, quote, "The one who has the keys of David." David was a great and mighty king. And when we hear of David in the Bible we're supposed to think of kingship, and rule, and a kingdom, and dominion, and lordship.

I want you to continually have a big picture of Jesus. When you have a little picture of Jesus, your problems get bigger. When you have a big picture of Jesus, your problems get smaller because you see them under the lordship, under the rule, under the dominion of Jesus.

This church was in a very difficult circumstance. That meant individually and collectively, the people had very difficult responsibilities and mission that Jesus had called and compelled them to. And he wants them to know that he sees all. That he rules over all. One of the great tragedies that happens is that people only see Jesus during his humble incarnation on the earth, as a poor, homeless, marginalized, Galilean peasant.

And I've said this over, and over, and over, but every time Jesus says something to one of the seven churches, he reminds them not of how he was, but also how he is after his death, after his resurrection, after his ascension, after his return to heaven. Jesus is not just a concept, Jesus is a person. Jesus is not dead, Jesus is alive. Jesus is not in humility, he's right now in glory. He's not a humble, marginalized, Galilean peasant, he is ruling, reigning, King of kings, Lord of lords, over all, who sees and knows everyone and everything. So, big picture of Jesus. He is the one who has the keys of David.

And then it goes on to say that he is "the holy one." Jesus is without sin. Jesus is altogether perfect. Some of you will wonder why the theme is the church, but the subject is Jesus in all of the seven letters, because at the center of the church is Jesus. It's all about Jesus. And when Jesus is known, when Jesus is loved, when Jesus is proclaimed, a church happens. A church is a people who are captivated by, in love with, committed to, saved by Jesus. He's a King; it says he's the holy one. He's not just the best person who's ever lived; he's in a category unto his own. He alone lived without sin. That made him the perfect substitute for sinners.

It also says that he is "the true one." Jesus never lies. Jesus never pulls a punch. Jesus only tells the truth. He always tells the truth. Whatever he says, whatever the Word of God says, that's the truth.

And lastly, he says, "I know your works." Again, how encouraging is this? How wonderful is this? How motivating is this? It really frustrates me when people who aren't serving the church spend their time criticizing the church. I've been in this for sixteen years since core-group phase. I have the great honor of serving at Mars Hill Church under our senior pastor, Jesus. And I can tell you, after sixteen years, those who are serving are rarely those who are complaining. Those who are serving are rarely those who are criticizing. Those who are serving are rarely those who are demanding.

Jesus says that he sees your works. Let me ask you personally, what are you doing? What are you supposed to be doing? Where are you supposed to be serving? What are you supposed to be giving? See, because during the course of the week, some of you who are leaders, you're thinking about Jesus and our church. Some of you who are servants, you're thinking about Jesus and our church. But some of you who are consumers, you're thinking about someone or something other than Jesus and our church. And you don't have works that you're doing.

Some of you wrongly thought, "Well, Christianity is not about works." We're saved by the works of Jesus and then we are saved to do good works with Jesus. That as we belong to Christ, we are to live life with Christ. We're to love what Jesus loves. We're to do what Jesus is doing.

Some of you, the real root of your despair, the root of your depression, the root of your frustration is that you don't serve others. You don't have the heart of Jesus. You're not giving. You're not caring. You're not trying. You're not praying. You're not serving. And then you'll show up at church and complain and say, "My needs are not met." Your greatest need is to serve. Your greatest need is to think of someone else, to give to someone else, to care for someone else.

I'll tell you, those who are giving, those who are praying, those who are caring, those who are serving, their hearts become like Jesus' heart. They love the church. They give themselves to what Jesus gave himself to. Friends, let me just tell you, in our day of consumerism and selfishness, the antidote is the lordship of Jesus and a devoted life to "good works." Doing whatever you can to love and serve as many as you can because that's the heart of Jesus.

So first of all, our king is who? Our King is Jesus. Above your boss, above your parents, above your pastors, above your coaches, above your teachers, is Jesus.

THE CHURCH IS HATED BY SATAN

Number two, if you're a Christian, you're part of the church, and the church is, quite frankly, hated by Satan. Satan hates the church. He just does, because those are the people that Jesus loves. And he hates Jesus, and so he hates the people that Jesus loves, and he hates the people that love Jesus.

And number one, the church is not powerful. There's always this myth that if we could just get more powerful than Christianity would be more popular. It's not true. For two thousand years some have tried to make Christianity powerful. It never works. Jesus is powerful, the church is not. The church is not.

He says it this way in Revelation 3:8, "I know that you have but little power." How many of you have felt like that? You look at the world, and economics, and politics, and you look at what's going on politically, and geopolitically, and what's going on morally, and sexually, and it just feels like it's all going to hell, literally.

Like, "I just feel powerless. Like, I can't change it. I get frustrated. I can blog. I can have people sign a petition. I can declare war. I can get depressed. Maybe I could run for office. Maybe I can get other people excited about a cause." But even that at the end of the day, you just come to the conclusion,

"I don't think I'm in charge. I don't think I'm in control. And I don't think if we just all get together and declare war, we're even going to win." "Have but little power."

Number two, the church is surrounded by false believers and false churches. He calls them "the synagogue of Satan." Now, that's not very politically correct, nice, or tolerant. That would be a terrible tweet today, right? I mean, Jesus just started renaming whole denominations and local churches, "synagogue of Satan." Anytime you've got Satan in the title, it's probably off track, right? Satan Memorial Bible Church. First Church of Satan.

And they would say, "No, no, no. What we are, we're an alternative denomination. We all got together, guys educated beyond their intelligence with more degrees than Fahrenheit read the Greek text, and they decided that we all get to get naked with people we're not married to. It's very official. A guy in a hat confirmed it." And Jesus says, "Synagogue of Satan. Synagogue of Satan."

And so, what there is for those who love Jesus and are committed to the Bible, there are always those who say they love Jesus, and say they've read the Bible, but are contradicting what Jesus says in the Bible. And there's always this temptation for the Christian church to compromise to become more acceptable, to become more appropriate.

Let me say this, not only is Jesus offensive, but so are Christians. And it doesn't mean that we want to offend everyone, but what we believe is by nature offensive because it's a call to repentance, first for ourselves and then for others. And some of you are going to be tempted and some of you have already been tempted to have sort of hyphenated, Christianity-lite. Somewhere where Jesus isn't really talked about. The Bible's not really open. Sin isn't really called out. Repentance is not really demanded.

And it's always been that way. And then some people freak out, and they got end-times charts on ammo boxes. "And it's the last days, and get your canned goods, and hide the kids in the basement. Do we have enough bottled water for Armageddon?" And they freak out. The truth is, it's been like this for two thousand years. The church has always been without power. There have always been false believers, and false churches, and false teachers.

And the result is, number three, that the church is always under pressure to deny the Bible and deny Jesus. There's always pressure. He says this, Revelation 3:8, "You've kept my word and have not denied my name." You know what that means? There was a lot of pressure to deny the Word of God. There was a lot of pressure to deny the name of Jesus. See, you could talk about God, you could talk about Lord, you could talk about spiritual power, you could talk about spirituality. You drop the name Jesus, and then it's on. Right? He says, "You've not denied my name. You're still talking about Jesus."

One of the greatest encouragements I've had in recent months as I'm dealing with unpaid volunteer leaders from multiple Mars Hill churches, as I'm dealing with them, I can honestly say this, I don't remember having a conversation with anyone that didn't include Jesus. "What's going on in your Community Group?" "Well, Jesus is really working on people." "Oh, Jesus." "What's going on in your Redemption Group?" "Man, people are meeting Jesus, and Jesus is really making a difference in their life." "Wow." "What's going on in the premarital counseling class?" "Couples are really learning to build their whole life with Jesus, not just as the first priority, but the center of everything." "Oh, Jesus." "What's going on at kids' ministry?" "Well, some kids are really meeting Jesus. The kids are learning about Jesus. The kids are singing to Jesus. For the first time kids are praying to Jesus."

Jesus says, "You've not denied my name," right? When he puts his ear over Mars Hill, he's still hearing his name. But there's always pressure to not say the name of Jesus, to deny the name of Jesus, to devalue the name of Jesus, and to not keep the Word. To come to the Scriptures and say, "Some of it is very difficult, or controversial, and on those things we're going to compromise and not have conviction."

See, Satan hates our church. Satan hates all local churches. So let me even say this too, watch your bitterness, watch your criticism, watch your frustration. I've failed at this. And I'm, in the grace of God, wanting to grow in this. If there's another church that loves Jesus and believes in the Bible, love them, pray for them, want good for them, don't criticize them. Satan's already doing all that he can to harm local churches. The longer I've been in ministry, the more I love all the churches that love Jesus.

Some of you would say, "Well, they believe different things than us." If it's on a secondary issue, we can talk about it, but we're not going to fight about it. And Mars Hill, as our church grows, and as God gives us favor, we don't want to use that to discourage others. We don't want to use that to become critical of others. We want to love and serve all who love and serve Jesus. Because Satan hates the church. And sometimes he will even empower a bitter believer to be a point of great division in the body of Christ.

THE CHURCH IS LOVED BY JESUS

Our King is Jesus and our church is hated. It's just hated. And it's loved. That's what it says. That the church is loved by Jesus. This is one of the greatest lines, Revelation 3:9, Jesus says to the whole church, "I have loved you." That's everything. That's it. Jesus loves us.

Do you believe that? Do you know that? Do you feel that? Jesus loves us. He just does. Now, don't get theological and start to figure out why. Just be grateful. He loves us. The church is the people that Jesus loves. You know why the church continues? Why our church continues? I just told you, it's not 'cause it's powerful. It's not because it's easy. It's not because there's no resistance. It's not because there's a lot of support from wayward teachers, and false believers, and denominations that have gone apostate. It's because Jesus loves us.

Do you actually believe that Jesus loves our church? He does. I'm absolutely convinced of this. And you know what? Jesus' love is enough. That's why he uses this language, "patient endurance." He uses the words that we'll be able to "hold fast," hang in there, and be the "one who conquers." That's all hope-filled language.

Yeah, life is hard. Yeah, compromise is tempting. Yeah, the critics are real. Yeah, Satan's at war. But you're going to be okay. Question is, how? Jesus says, "Well, it's easy. It's very simple. I love you." Because Jesus' love is always enough. Jesus' love is always enough. It's enough to sustain us. It's enough to empower us. It's enough to encourage us. Absolutely. Absolutely.

I keep coming back to this verse in Ephesians where it says that Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her. And the picture there is that Jesus is like a groom and the church is like a bride. And Jesus is like a husband who is completely devoted to his wife. And he loves her so much that he would lay down his own life, that he would die for her, that he would literally give himself for her.

Do you love your church? See, what we have is, we have a culture, even at Mars Hill, and I want to make a course correction, where "I love Jesus." Well, if you love Jesus, you love what Jesus loves. You love the church. Right? No father could say, "You know, I love the family, I just don't love the children." If you love Jesus, you love what Jesus loves. And yeah, we like to say it's all about Jesus, but it's not only about Jesus. It's about loving Jesus and loving the church, because that's who Jesus loves.

I don't think I've done the best job of articulating this, so I'll just say it clearly, I love you too. And the leaders love you. And the elders love you. And we love you. When we're together, you know what we're talking about? You. How the church is doing. And how we can love and serve more people and do better. And sometimes we're frustrated, not just with you, with ourselves. "Man, we could do better, by the grace of God. We could love better, by the grace of God. We could serve better, by the grace of God." But our hearts are absolutely filled with the love of Jesus for you and for us.

It just kills me when people don't love the church. When they use it for something else. When they don't serve the church, they just criticize the church. It just destroys me. And I know sometimes it's easy to get distracted. You've got your duties, and your responsibilities, and your vocation, and your family. But I want you to continually be asking Jesus to give you his heart for the church.

He says, "I have loved you." Could you stand before Mars Hill Church and say that? "Mars Hill Church, I have loved you." If not, then what is Jesus calling you to do to change? The most devastating thing that any member of the church has ever said to me in sixteen years, it was a person that I knew and loved, and felt like I'd served. They looked at me and they said, "I don't think you love our church." I felt like I got shot in the soul.

And maybe that was my fault. Maybe I haven't articulated my love for the church. I felt like giving my whole life to it was an indication that maybe I did care. But hear this from the founding pastor, I love you very much. Jesus loves you perfectly. And Jesus wants us all to love this church, to care about what he cares about, to serve where he's serving, to give to what he gave his life for.

THE CHURCH MUST LISTEN TO THE HOLY SPIRIT

And so my next point, or I should say, Jesus' next point. You'll notice I'm just following his outline. The church must listen to the Holy Spirit. This is individual believers, Christians in the church, leaders in the church, the whole church, have to listen to the Holy Spirit. He says this in Revelation 3:13, "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches." This is a continual refrain in the seven letters to the seven churches. "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."

Let me tell you how the Holy Spirit speaks to the church. First and foremost, he speaks through the Scriptures. Right? All Scripture is inspired, it's God-breathed. Peter tells us that men just didn't make this stuff up, that they were carried along by the Holy Spirit, right? That the Holy Spirit inspired human authors to write perfect Scriptures.

And so the first and foremost way of hearing what the Spirit says to the churches is in the Bible, in the Bible, in the Bible, in the Bible, in the Bible, in the Bible, in the Bible all the time. Studying the Bible. Memorizing the Bible. Learning the Bible. Committed to the Scriptures. Being under the authority of the Scriptures. What does God say? Who is Jesus? What are the instructions of the Bible? What does God want for us? What does God have for us?

The series that I'll hit after this is called, "Jesus Loves the Church." We're going to spend the whole summer just looking at what the Bible says about the church. And that's one way we can have an ear to what the Spirit is saying to our church. Okay, well, he wrote a bunch of stuff down, and it is for all churches. And we need to hear that before we hear anything else.

In addition, sometimes God will give gifts, convictions, hopes, plans, dreams for people in the church, leaders in the church. And it's the Holy Spirit's way of compelling us toward, "Well, do this, and start there, and help them, and fix that." And when we have those kinds of inclinations, we also submit to spiritual authority. We say the Holy Spirit just doesn't live in one person. The Holy Spirit lives in all of God's people. We're going to submit to spiritual authority and see, is this from the Lord, is this a good idea?

You need to know that your leaders listen to the Holy Spirit and that prayer is a big part of decision making at our church. Before I make any big decisions, determine any preaching series, things of that nature, it's silence and solitude for me. As the church has gotten bigger and more complicated, I need more time with Jesus, filled with the Holy Spirit. I need hours a week to think, to pray, to listen, to repent, to sing to Jesus, to read the Scriptures, to journal out my thoughts, and to try and hear from the Holy Spirit, "Okay, how do I need to change? Where do I need to grow? Where have I failed? How can I do better? What do we need to do? Where could we serve? Who could we love? What could we improve on?" Asking the Holy Spirit. Your senior leaders do the same. There are certain leaders that get up really early and just pray for hours before they even turn on their phone and start their day.

And I would ask you, be asking the Holy Spirit, "What do you have for me? What do you want me to know? What do you want me to do? Where do you want me to serve? How much do you want me to give? What parts of the Scripture do I just really need to dig in on right now?" And the Holy Spirit, he is God, he knows all, he works with Jesus, he indwells the believer. He will help lead you and guide you.

And that could become dangerous if you're not under the authority of Scripture, and humble, and submissive to godly leaders. But if you're under the authority of the Scriptures and godly leaders, the Holy Spirit can absolutely lead you, direct you, call you, gift you, motivate you, compel you. Just need to listen, what's he saying?

Friends, sometimes this means turn off the TV, turn off the phone, turn off the computer, shut out the noise, and listen. Listen to the Holy Spirit. Pray, seeing what thoughts he puts in your mind, what longings he puts in your heart, what Scriptures he brings to memory, what wise counsel he brings into your life through godly people, what opportunities he opens your eyes to. And you say, "Wow, there's a huge need there. I think God is giving me this passion to go meet that need."

That's what it looks like, practically, to have an ear open to God the Holy Spirit, and to hear what he's saying to you, and hear what he's saying to us.

What can happen is sometimes churches will look at other churches and just do what they do. Or we'll just choose parachurch ministries, and buy their products, and do their programs. The truth is, some of those things may be well and good, but we need to hear what the Holy Spirit has for us. And not just following the leadership of others, but following the leadership of Jesus and the Holy Spirit, whom he's given us.

A DOOR OF OPPORTUNITY IN PHILADELPHIA

And he says to the church in Philadelphia, this is an amazing statement for a small church that's struggling. Revelation 3:8, he says, "I have set before you an open door, which no one is able to shut." You get this idea of a door, do you see that image? Sometimes doors are closed, and locked, and shut, and you can't get in. Other times doors are open, you're invited to pass through.

Jesus says that he's opened a door that no one can shut. It's a door of opportunity. It's the door between the culture and the kingdom. The kingdom of God he's talking about here, the new Jerusalem. The eternal city of God that is being created by Jesus and will be brought down at the end of time for all of God's people to dwell in together forever, in the new creation. Between that kingdom of God and the culture on the earth, there's a door. There's a door. And through that door people pass to meet Jesus and to receive eternal life. And through that door God's people are sent out on mission to the world, to preach the gospel, to make disciples, to plant churches.

Friends, you need to know this, a lot of churches, Jesus has shut their door, because of sin, because of moral infidelity on behalf of the leaders, because of financial misappropriation, because of false teaching. Jesus has shut the door, and just said, "You're not going to grow. You're not going to reach people. You're not going to make disciples and plant churches, because you're a synagogue of Satan. So we're not going to multiply that on the earth."

There are some churches that Jesus opens the door a little bit. They start growing, and they get an opportunity, and people are getting saved. There are other doors Jesus just seems to kick the door right off the hinge. And it's a whole bunch of people coming into the kingdom. And a whole bunch of missionaries going out into the culture. That door is wide open.

Every time you pass through a doorway, pray for your church. And pray this prayer: "Jesus, please keep the door open for Mars Hill Church." Every time you pass through a doorway, pray for your church.

Jesus tells the church in Philadelphia, "I've opened a door for you. A door that no one will be able to shut." Now, let me tell you a little bit about the church in Philadelphia. It's originally in modern-day Turkey. That's where it is. I've been there a few times to scout it out. There's not much left. There are some ruins from a large cathedral in the sixth century.

One of the reasons there's not much left is there are devastating earthquakes there, historically, that have just destroyed the city. In fact, here it is. That is the ruins of the great church at Philadelphia in modern-day Turkey. And they've put a mosque in front of it, so you can't even get a photo without a mosque. It was apparently, at least in the sixth century when this structure was built, a very large church. Lots of people met there and gathered there. It's a real place. It's a place that Jesus had no criticism of, but only encouragement for.

Let me tell you a little bit about the church in Philadelphia. It was a church-planting church. They sent missionaries and church planters out. If you believe some of church history, they actually started church planting all the way into India. Some of the first church plants in India came from the church at Philadelphia.

Here's what's interesting, historically. If you go there today, you won't find a lot of believers. Most of them fled modern day, around 1947. If you go back historically, the church at Philadelphia was amazing. John is writing this in the year, roughly around AD 100. And Jesus says, "I'm opening a door that no one can shut. You're not powerful. There are false believers, teachers, and churches all around you. But you really do love me, and I really do love you." And they took that encouragement from Jesus, and do you know how long this church continued, generation after generation after generation, to serve Jesus? Over 1,200 years. Over 1,200 years. That's the power of Jesus saying, "I love you."

It's so powerful that your great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great grandkids are still riding off of that affection. Still motivated by that devotion. Twelve hundred years the Christian church stayed in Philadelphia. Earthquakes would hit, the church would fall to the ground, and they would come out and rebuild it, for 1,200 years. They sent missionaries out to plant churches for 1,200 years. They stayed faithful to Jesus for 1,200 years. That means over 1,200 years later—the people who received this letter, if you showed up in the first century, you would see the church and you would see people with certain last names. And if you came back in 1300 AD, there would be people still in that church with the same last name.

See, this is God's vision for the church. That Jesus would love you and you would give your life to the church. And that Jesus would love your children and they would give their life to the church. And that Jesus would love your grandchildren and they would give their life to the church. And

that 1,200 years later, it is possible, in the grace of God, if we get a vision beyond the weekend and ourselves, that our children's children's children's children would be loved by Jesus and give their life to the church.

But it starts with matriarchs and patriarchs. It starts with men and women saying, "Jesus loves me and this is our church. And I'm going to raise my children to receive the love of Jesus and serve our church, and they will do the same." Twelve hundred years.

What happens then is Mohammad comes along in about AD 700 and Islam is founded. And where Christianity is a religion of invitation, Islam is a religion of imposition. And all of a sudden there are wars being fought to take what was in large part a Christian people, and to convert them to Islam, or to kill them by the sword.

Which city do you think was the last, final city to fall in what is modern-day Turkey? Philadelphia. In 1342, Turkish Muslim soldiers showed up to the church. All the other cities had fallen. Many of the churches had given up. Many of the Christians had fled. And many had been brutally murdered, a martyr's death. And the last place to fall was the church at Philadelphia. They refused to compromise. They refused to deny Jesus Christ.

When he tells them in Revelation 3, "You have not denied my name," twelve hundred years later the church in Philadelphia, by the grace of God, did not deny the name of Jesus. And they died. They were slaughtered in their own church. Women, children, young, old, slaughtered. Put to death by the sword, in their church. That's how they shut down the church at Philadelphia. They had to murder all the believers. This is an amazing church. This is an encouraging church. This is a Spirit-filled church. And Jesus loves the church. Mars Hill, I'm not saying we're that kind of church. I'm saying, in the grace of God, we should aspire to be.

And Satan has done a horrible thing in Turkey. Operation World now says it's one of the least church-ed nations on the earth. In a nation of some perhaps 70 million people, there are 3,500 evangelical Christians. See, there are some who just assume, "Well, someone will take care of the church. Someone will keep it biblical. Someone will keep it faithful. Someone will pay the bills. Someone will serve. Someone will lead the groups. Someone will care for the people. Me, I can be a consumer and not a missionary. I can take and not give. I can criticize and not help."

Christianity is about Jesus and his people. And Jesus is always faithful. And the question is: Will his people be? I don't know if there will be a Mars Hill Church in 1,200 years. But I hope and pray, I hope and pray that the people with our last name, in 1,200 years, they would hear from Jesus, "I love you. You've stayed true to my Word. You've not denied my name. I don't have any criticism of you, I have encouragement for you."

A DOOR OF OPPORTUNITY FOR MARS HILL CHURCH

He says, "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches." Friends, I believe that Jesus' word for us today—he would have things from each of the seven churches that he would speak to us, most assuredly, but I believe this is a prophetic word, this is a timely word, "I have set before you an open door, which no one is able to shut."

Jesus has opened a door for our church that no one can shut. It's a door of opportunity. I don't know how long the door of opportunity is open. For them, the door was open for 1,200 years. For us, we do not know. Perhaps that door stayed open because they were faithful. And when you become unfaithful, perhaps that is when Jesus shuts the door.

We do not want Jesus to open a door of opportunity just for us. For any church that believes the Bible and loves Jesus, we pray for an open door of opportunity. We pray that there, many people would meet Jesus, and many leaders would be sent out to make disciples and plant churches. And so I know Jesus is working in places not called Mars Hill. And I honestly celebrate wherever the door is open and Jesus' people are on mission.

But for us, as a church, let me say this to you, in 1996, Jesus opened a door. And he's kept the door open since 1996. He did it in the least likely place: the least-churched city in America. He did it as we were going after the least likely people: college-educated, single non-Christians, including many young men. He did it with the most unlikely person: a guy who had never been a member of a church, didn't have any formal theological education, was rather unpleasant, and didn't know what he was doing. Okay.

But the door opened. And the door has remained open. And we have seen Jesus take us from dozens, to dozens of thousands. From one location to fourteen locations. From a handful of Christians to a stadium of Christians. We've seen Jesus open an amazing door. I can't explain it. People come along, the media asks all the time, "What's the secret?" "Hey, Jesus is alive. That's the secret. If Jesus isn't alive, there's no other way to account for all that is happening. Jesus is alive, there's your secret." Then they say, "Well, what else?" "That's it. That's all we got."

Jesus is alive. He loves this church. He's opened a door so that this church could reach the world, and the world could meet him. See, the critics can't shut this door. And false teachers can't shut this door. And Judases who join staff can't shut this door. And people who refuse to give and demand to take, they can't shut this door. And people who would stand back and criticize those who are serving, they can't shut this door. And we don't have real estate. And we're losing places to meet. And we're upside down. And we've outgrown our systems. And it's an economic downturn. And that door won't shut. And I don't care who we vote for in November, that door won't shut. Because above our elections is our King.

And it is a frustrating season when the church of Jesus Christ is compromised, on her heels, apologizing, ashamed to say his name, when the door is wide open. The door has been open since 1996, and by the grace of God, the door will be open for 1,200 years.

And here's my heart: I love you. I love you with Jesus' love. I'm good to the end. I know it's not all about me. It's all about Jesus. But I'm not going anywhere. I don't want to be a conference speaker. I don't want to be some consultant. I don't want to be a guy who just does leadership development seminars. I want us to have a church, a great church, an awesome church, a Spirit-filled, Bible-soaked, Jesus-fired-up church.

And I tell you why I'm here: I love you and the door's open. There's an opportunity that God has set before us that is very unique. It is incredibly exciting. Every time you pass through a door, pray for our church. "Jesus, thanks for the open door. Jesus, help us go through it to reach others and bring others through it to meet you. Jesus, keep that door open."

AN UPDATE ON MARS HILL CHURCH

I'm going to give you a few things in closing that I want to share with you. As Jesus has a bit of a members meeting with the church at Philadelphia, he's been paying careful attention to what's been happening. And he shares with them what he wants from them. And as your leader I have an opportunity to do the same. I'll share with you a few things that are going on at Mars Hill and then we're going to call you to respond.

If you're not a Christian, the door's open. Give your life to Jesus. Give your sin to Jesus. Pass that threshold of faith. If you're a Christian who has been a consumer and a taker, it's time to become a worshiper and a giver. We'll collect our offering. For those of you who have sin in your life that has held you back because of guilt and shame, we want you to repent of that sin. Take Communion knowing that Jesus' broken body, Jesus' shed blood, is what takes away your sin, and you now can serve God with the gifts that you have on the ministry that he's called you to. And for those of you who are leaders that have not yet been leading, the door's open for you to let us know that you're ready to cross that threshold from observer to leader.

I want to share with you some things that are going on at Mars Hill. Here's a bit of a church update. Here's where we are. We are in the midst of a difficult season. Not the hardest season we've ever been in, but one of those difficult seasons. And I'm going to explain it to you globally so you can pray personally.

In the past we had basically a budget year. So we'd look at our whole year and make our plans. Well, things change at Mars Hill so fast that it's very difficult to guess what's going to be happening in twelve months, let alone twelve minutes. And so for us, the way our budget year works is it goes from July through June. So in June we finish our budget year.

What we used to do, is we used to budget and then we'd get a big year-end bonus in December. So a big chunk of our giving would come in December, so we'd set an annual budget. Well, the problem is, you're running a deficit until the end of the year. It's kind of like a family who says, "Well, we're going to get a big year-end bonus, so we'll just run up our credit card debt, and then we'll pay it off in December." Well, number one, you better hope the bonus is good. Number two, you better hope the bonus happens. Otherwise you've got a real crisis.

So what we've done is we've made a course correction. We now have the speed with our accounting and reporting, that we live off of what we bring in week to week. And then at the end of the year, if we get a big bonus, great. We can repair an existing church building. We can go plant a new church. We can help missionaries overseas. We can start something new. Praise God. We can improve something that's going.

So the old model was an annual budget. The new one is a weekly budget. The old one was reliant on the year-end bonus. The new one says, "If we get a bonus." You see the truth is, if there's an economic crisis, or we have a massive snowstorm, or we miss at the end of the year, we have a real crisis. We want to avoid and avert that. And so it was unsustainable, and now it is.

Now, what that means, as well, is that we have to make some budget adjustments right now. So we're downsizing our staff. Pray for some good, godly people that we can no longer afford. We're having to cut back on some programming. This is a year, for us, of pruning. And then we're hoping in the future that Jesus will keep the door open, and we can do more. Here's where it is.

Some of you say, "What, it's all about the money?" Jesus says, "Where your treasure is, your heart is." If I walk into your house and you have rickety old furniture and you're sleeping on a futon, and you've got a TV the size of a JumboTron in an NFL stadium, it gives me a window into your heart. The one thing you have given everything to is that.

So, percentage of adults that gave at Mars Hill, 41 percent. That includes households. The average giving per adult per week is just under \$33. That's 4,838 households. Our weekly attendance is from 13,000 up to 15,000 a week. What we want is for those who are Christians to love their church.

Now, here's the past budget model. In the past, we brought in about \$30 per adult per week. We're praying and hoping that goes up to \$35. We have church costs, facility costs, and central costs. So church costs are local staff programming. Facilities, places to meet. Central is the website, human resources, legal, me, the media team, all of that. And so we were running, in addition to projects, investments, and expansion, we were running a weekly deficit of \$22.61 per person. And then waiting for the big year-end bonus to pay it off.

Well, going forward, the ultimate goal is to live within our means. Right now we have trimmed the budget significantly, to where we're losing \$7.44 an adult per week. And by the end of the year, by December, we want to actually be flush, or in a profitable phase, where we're just a little bit over in case there's an emergency, a crisis, or a need, we have a bit of margin in our budget.

What that'll allow us to do is, at the end of the year, like I said, if the year-end giving is strong, we can talk about how to reach more people for Jesus, not how to pay off the credit card debt. That make sense? So we're in the midst of that.

So if you hear, "Hey, Mars Hill's canceled a few programs. The staff is shrinking a little bit. They're making some transitions," it's not that anybody has sinned, or done anything wrong, or is in trouble, it's just that we had an economic model that wasn't sustainable for our future. And that's the update.

So pray for your churches. More than ever, the unpaid elders and the volunteers are more needed than ever. Here's the weekly loss. Shoreline's losing

\$18 an adult a week. U-District, almost \$12. West Seattle, \$11. Sammamish, almost \$10. Orange County, over \$8. Olympia, over \$8. Downtown, over \$8. Albuquerque is losing \$7. Bellevue, \$6. Everett, almost \$6. Ballard, almost \$5. Federal Way, almost \$5. Phoenix, or excuse me, Portland, maybe that was prophetic, we'll start Phoenix next, almost \$4. And Rainier Valley is the church that's losing the least on a weekly basis. And I'll tell you what, that church is meeting on the campus of the Union Gospel Mission, and a large percentage of attenders are single mothers from the battered women's shelter. And that church is losing the least. Okay.

Now, you look at this, you say, "Fourteen churches." See, this is the myth at Mars Hill: "There's a money fairy somewhere and the money fairy takes care of it." Okay. You're the money fairy. Okay.

The percentage of adults who gave. Okay. So, if you look at the average— you look at our churches, which churches have a lot of people giving, which churches don't have a lot of people giving? Shoreline, about two-thirds of people are giving. West Seattle, about two-thirds. Sammamish is almost two-thirds. Olympia is almost 60 percent. Bellevue is at 54 percent. Everett is at 45 percent. Federal Way, 42 percent. Portland, 42 percent. Ballard, 41 percent. Albuquerque, 38 percent. Orange County, 32 percent. U-District, 29 percent. Rainier Valley, 27 percent. And Downtown, with a lot of working-class singles, 24 percent.

Big variance. Big variance. So, in some of our churches, two-thirds of people are giving anything. And that could be \$5 a millennium. You know. And some of our churches, only one in four people is giving anything. So you can see the variance.

The big issue is, for us, the money quite frankly and the giving quite frankly, it's not about the number of dollars; really for me, the first and primary thing is the number of people. How many people care? How many people give because Jesus says, "Where your treasure is, there your heart is"? Generally the people who are giving are serving. Generally the people who are giving are praying. Generally the people who are giving are caring. And so I would ask you, Mars Hill, to listen to what the Holy Spirit is saying to the churches. What is he saying to you?

So, for the next year our intent is not to start any new Mars Hill churches. Now, I'm not saying we won't, because if something comes available, we'll look at it. But right now, the plan is not to start a new Mars Hill church in the next year. To have a lean staff. To have a season of tight. To live within our means. To make some course corrections in every way. To strengthen and grow our local churches. And then in about a year from now, the fall of 2013, yeah, we want to start Mars Hill Renton. Yeah, we want to start Mars Hill Bothell or Kirkland, up in that area. We want to get Mars Hill Federal Way settled into a new home so we can start Mars Hill Tacoma.

In addition, we are looking for a home for Mars Hill Everett. They've outgrown their kids' space. We're looking for a good permanent home for Mars Hill Federal Way and may have good news to report shortly. Mars Hill Olympia has just entered into a brand-new space that we're renting and will give them some future potential for growth. Mars Hill Orange County has gotten an eviction notice from the city, and we have nowhere to meet. We do not know where we will be week to week. So pray for them. So some of our churches we need to help strengthen and stabilize.

And then also we want to, in the future, once we've gotten through this season of transition, yeah, we want to go back to planting a lot more churches. Right now, we have three of our elders that feel called to go out and plant other churches, independent churches, and we intend to support them, as well as international church planting in places like Ethiopia, and into India, and international mission work.

We want to live in a way that is lean so that we can give in a way that is generous. And Mars Hill, it's a miracle, we're up by a few thousand people over last year. Many people are meeting Jesus. Many lives are getting changed. Many marriages are getting healed. And I want you to hear what the Spirit is saying to the churches. And here's what he's saying, it's from Jesus Christ, "I have loved you." Jesus loves you Mars Hill. And he still does. And the door's still open, amen? So let's go through it together.

I'll ask the financial stewards to come forward to collect our offering. We'll then take Communion, remembering the broken body and shed blood of Jesus Christ, in our place for our sins. And you know what we're going to do? We're going to sing to our King. Because he what? He has loved us.

Father God, thank you for an opportunity to teach the Bible at Mars Hill. Thank you that you opened a door in 1996, a door that no one can close. I pray you keep that door open for 1,200 years. And I pray that we would pass through it, those of us who are Christian, to be on mission in the world. And God, for those who are unbelievers, I pray they would pass through it to meet Jesus. And God, for those who have been giving, and caring, and praying, and serving, and making it happen. God, thank you for the encouraging word from Jesus, who says, "I know your works." So Jesus, we thank you for your love and we thank you for their works. In Jesus' name, amen.

Note: This sermon transcript has been edited for readability.