

# Fairview Memorial Missionary Baptist Church

## Winter Bible Study

### Lesson Series: The Empty Tomb and a Risen Savior

### Lesson: Unlock and Open the Door to Christ

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*Revelation 3:20 Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me.*

**Introduction:** Quite a stir occurred on the first day of the week over 2,000 years ago. On what would become our Christian Sabbath, very early in the morning several women went out to see Jesus's tomb three days after He was buried. After the traumatic events surrounding the death of our Lord, Luke records that Mary Magdalene, Joanna, and Mary the mother of James (and Jesus) went to see the burial site for our Lord. Early that morning they found the tomb disturbed. The stone covering to the **door** of the sepulchre (or tomb) and sealed by the Roman Government was rolled to the side. They entered through the door of that tomb and found it empty. In the confusion and emotion of that moment, they did not realize that there were two men standing beside them in shining garments. The angels appeared and asked the question of "why seek ye the living among the dead?" They go on to tell them, "He is not here, but is risen". What joy! This stone represented the sealed door of sin that separated us from the Devine. We have access to the possibility of eternal life through Christ's death, burial and resurrection. Because of Jesus, the sin curse had been removed, as the second Adam has come.

This lesson is a study about doors and our ability to access Christ on his terms. In this Lesson we want to cover and illustrate the following important points:

- 1.) Review the definition and natural uses of doors in the scriptures
- 2.) Discuss scriptural uses for doors as symbolism with important thoughts on important ideas around systematic theology. Symbolism must be used carefully because it does not always interconnect or "build" in the scriptures.
- 3.) Properly illustrate that it is not possible for the lost to unlock and open the Door to Christ.
- 4.) Demonstrate the only real way to unlock and open the door to Christ is, as He intends, through His Church.

**Unequal access to Jesus:** As it relates to men's conditions, there are three general classes of people: the unaccountable, the lost, and the saved.

Our ability for access to Christ rests solely upon our condition before God. Each of these groups has different access to Christ and has different approaches and limitations. If we've been saved for any length of time, we forget what it was like to be lost. We don't remember what it was like to have such limited access and lack of understanding of how to approach God. The unaccountable and lost often ask

questions about our ability to know God. Does He hear our prayers? How will He convict me? How will I know that I'm lost? How will I know that I'm saved? These are questions we all considered as we were considering how to approach the Almighty God, Our Everlasting Father and the Prince of Peace.

And while I do personally believe that we have access to God in all three categories, it is certainly not equal access. Once saved, you are His child and He becomes your Heavenly Father. When we read God's word, it's important that we understand what group that the Bible speaks of to know His teachings about proper access.

According to Jesus's teachings, on the final judgement day the Son of Man will gather all nations and separate them as a shepherd divides His sheep from His goats. The Sheep will inherit the kingdom prepared from the foundation of the world and be given "life eternal". The goats will be given "everlasting punishment" (Mat 25:21-46). When reading God's Word, never forget that access for God's Children to Christ is very different than for those that are lost.

**What is a Door:** A door is an opening or passage into a house, or other building, or into any room, apartment or closet, by which persons enter. A door can serve as an obstacle which serves as a natural barrier protecting or trapping both sides of this barrier. The term "door" can also represent the physical function and barrier for which that door naturally creates such as the "door of life".

The term door is translated and used 189 times in the King James Version with most describing important natural doors. The list below includes significant literal accounts of doors:

- Noah's ark
- Abraham's tent door
- Lot's shutting the door trying to protect his guests
- The Israelites protected behind the door with the lamb's blood upon the upper door and side posts
- The door of the Tabernacle of the Congregation
- Priests closing house doors to prevent disease/leprosy.
- Uriah slept at the door of the king's house with all the servants and didn't go down to his house.
- Amnon puts Tamar out and bolts the door after her.
- Naaman stands at Elisha's door.
- The Widow was told by Elisha to shut the door with her two sons and pour out oil into empty vessels.
- Solomon recommended his son stays away from the "symbolic" strange woman's door.
- The Colt tied by the door.
- Those that buried Ananias were at the door.
- Peter and Paul's prison doors.
- Peter shut out after being delivered from prison.

**Proper biblical interpretation of symbolism in the Bible:** Proper interpretation of the scriptures is important to the general health and welfare of our spiritual lives. History is littered

with formally sound churches that failed to advance proper biblical principles and now maintain irregular doctrinal practices.

Never at any time in the history of the world have Christians had access to more information related to God's word. With a simple internet search, we can study God's word through the Bible's original Greek, Aramaic and Hebrew languages. We can scan the Bible's pages electronically, use biblical dictionaries, examine historic sermons and books, view historic Baptist writings, study biblical locations, and ancient world histories with ease. At the same time, we also must be cautious as we have access to more false teaching than ever before. There are more "new ideas" than ever before. It takes real effort through the Holy Spirit to sincerely and correctly divide the Word of Truth.

**Practical understanding of rules of biblical interpretation:** Part of correct interpretation is the proper understanding and meaning of biblical symbolism. Several considerations must be made as it relates to proper interpreting of the Bible. We will use the term of Door as an example.

**The rule of definition:** Study the definition and consider the plain meaning of the words. More difficult words may require the use of a Hebrew/English or Greek/English lexicon so that the English translation is properly understood.

Sometimes a door is just a door and its translation is literal. Sometimes a door is symbolic and is intended to represent some spiritual truth. For example, God's response to Cain was "if thou doest well, shall thou not be accepted? and if thou doest not well, sin lieth at the door." (Gen 4:7). This is a good example since we don't walk out of our house and see sin literally laying on our door mat, but all understand what God is trying to symbolically communicate to Cain.

**The rule of usage:** We must remember that the Bible was written by, to, and for Jews. The words, pictures, symbolism, and idioms must be intelligible to them. Likewise, Jewish understanding of the culture of the 1<sup>st</sup> century Roman Empire is important to understanding the New Testament. The Bible is applicable to every time; therefore, we can interpret the scriptures to mean something that only our current generation would understand. God in Revelation speaks directly to a Church that existed at the time and was located in Laodicea.

**The rule of context:** A scripture's meaning must be gathered from context. Every word read must be understood within context of what is before and after the scripture being studied. For example, the Sin that symbolically lies at Cain's door is God's warning to the awful Sin that Cain is about to commit (after) based on the condemnation of his conscience for offering improper sacrifices to God (before). God's example was that a sacrifice for sin required a blood sacrifice (before).

Elder H.C. Vanderpool was a strong proponent for reading each scripture in the context of Who, What, When, Where and How. Practicing this provides great context to better understanding the Word of God.

Another consideration regarding context includes an understanding that chapters and verses were added to allow for better study of the scriptures. Chapters were added to most bibles in the 13<sup>th</sup> century. Verses were added around the mid-16<sup>th</sup> century, including the 1560 Geneva Bible. These divisions, while helpful to study, should never limit the reader from the study of scriptural context. The Church at Laodicea is spoken to in the context of counsel provided to six other churches that serve for comparison and reference.

**The rule of historical background:** We must understand the life and the society of the times in which the Scripture was written. There remains the great tendency to believe the most relevant time that the scriptures speak to is today, when the greatest context of the scriptures should be the time that they are written. The Laodicean's would have understood what God had communicated to them through this revelation. Biblical scholarship requires us to read the Word in its historical background and context.

**The rule of precedent:** We cannot violate the known usage of the word and invent another meaning for any word. One can remember the old joke, "When is a door not a door? The response, "when it's ajar". In the scriptures, we need to always look for the intended meaning. A door is a door and we shouldn't make this word, or any word mean other than what was intended by God through each writer.

**The rule of unity:** We must look at the scriptures as a whole. While artificial intelligence may tell you there are 80 books of the Bible. We firmly believe the Holy scriptures is a book made of the Old and New Testaments and include 66 different books. While there are many different writers, there is one God and His Word must be viewed in its completeness using these rules. For example, unity of scriptures as a rule requires an explanation on how Jesus can be both the door (John 10:2) and be outside the door, standing and knocking (Rev 3:20).

**The rule of inference:** An inference can be defined as one fact reasonably implied from another fact. It is the result of logical consequences. We must be careful to rightly divide the word as not to make false conclusions from twisting this rule to make God's word say what we want. For example, some infer that we should "judge not, that ye be not judged" (Matt 7:1). Or Jesus speaking about not casting the first stone so you can go and do anything that you want to do without being reproved by others (John 8:27). While violating many of these rules listed, one might infer this is what is being spoken about. These are only efforts to justify sin and create an inference that doesn't exist.

**Guidance of the Holy Spirit:** Volumes can be written about the need for the Holy Spirit to guide our thoughts, hearts, and doctrines. The Truth is from God and is never our own. The Bible is not here to justify ourselves, but to reprove us and our world from sin. It's important that the Holy Spirit becomes our aid and guide when interpreting the Word of God.

*I John 4:5-6 They are of the world: therefore, speak they of the world, and the world heareth them. We are of God: he that knoweth God heareth us; he that is not of God heareth not us. Hereby know we the spirit of truth, and the spirit of error.*

**Doctrinal errors regarding doors:** A door is used in multiple ways in the scripture to describe different thoughts. Sometimes a door is physical and sometimes symbolic. When symbolism is used, we must be careful to make sure that we properly understand each illustration. If a door is used to describe one spiritual truth, we can't necessarily imply that each door's use is the same so that we can build a comprehensive compendium of ascending theology. Unless the interpretation is clear, one cannot assume that one door automatically describes the other.

For example, it is a doctrinal error to teach that the lost have Jesus Christ knocking outside their heart's door just waiting for them to ask Him to enter. This is not to say that Jesus doesn't want to save lost souls. It just means that they have to meet His conditions and not theirs. People wrongly support this error because of a misinterpretation of Rev 3:20. They Improperly attribute this verse as instructions to the lost which creates a significant fundamental error.

We can illustrate this thought by using the children's bible song titled Behold, behold which illustrates this important point.

Behold, behold  
I stand at the door and knock, knock, knock (Jesus)  
If anyone (lost/saved?) hear my voice, (Jesus)  
If anyone (lost/saved?) hear my voice, (Jesus)  
And will open, open, open the door.  
I will come in.

The one knocking and the voice speaking is definitely that of Jesus. The scripture used as the title of this lesson and in this song is definitely Revelation 3:20. However, using the rule of context, these instructions are intended not for the lost but for the members at the Church at Laodicea. These instructions would have been given to saved Christians.

Please take time and prayerfully contrast this account with what Jesus says on the Sermon on the Mount:

*Matthew 7:7-8 Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened.*

These words are spoken to an entirely different audience. It is believed that Jesus's teaching brought a wide variety of people to hear what He had to say. One would expect that the assembly on the mountain is being encouraged to ask, seek and knock. In context, Jesus's Sermon on the Mount is supported with promises that earnest searching will end in results. This Sermon also encourages the assembly to seek for the strait gate, and that a good tree will bear certain good fruit. It further states that when we heed Jesus's sayings it's as if we are building our house upon the rock. These teachings have a very different tone of encouragement for the individual to search out after God.

The Sermon is much different than Jesus's teachings in Revelation. He is asking for the door to be opened unto Him. The words in Revelation are for instructions to the church that has shut Jesus out. Jesus's word to Laodicea provides both encouragement and significant reproof.

It's important for us to understand that these accounts are not doctrinally interchangeable and if improperly joined, will lead to false interpretations. As Baptists, we do not believe that the lost have unconditional access to Christ at any time on their terms.

**John and messages to the seven churches:** In the book of Revelation, we find that John is facing tribulation as he has been exiled on the isle of Patmos. John's purpose in writing was to communicate what he saw as revealed by Jesus Christ. John was first instructed by Jesus to write to these seven churches in Asia.

If you look closely, John very explicitly designates who Jesus was as he knew Him personally. John describes Jesus as the first begotten of the dead and that He loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood. This is the same Alpha and Omega, that was in the beginning and will be in the ending. Christ asserts His pre-existing title as the great "I AM". These words indicate that in the beginning He (Christ) was inside the threshold of the door at the beginning" of time. This basically serves as support for the existence of Christ before time began.

Jesus Christ wanted to speak a message to the seven churches, and by doing so also speaks to us today. John wrote to provide instructions to each church angel or pastoral messenger. These instructions were provided to give important guidance to the acceptable and unacceptable conditions of each church at the time. Each church existed at the time of writing so Jesus's instructions would have been provided directly to each of the seven churches, none of which exist today.

**Doors in Revelation:** The word door is importantly used three times in his area of the scriptures.

#### **Message to the Church at Philadelphia**

*Rev 3:8 I know thy works: behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it: for thou hast a little strength, and hast kept my word, and hast not denied my name. ...*

#### **Message to the Church at Laodicea**

*Rev 3:20 Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me.*

#### **Transition to the Scene in Heaven**

*Rev 4:1 After this I looked, and, behold, a door was opened in heaven: and the first voice which I heard was as it were of a trumpet talking with me; which said, Come up hither, and I will shew thee things which must be hereafter.*

**The message to the Church at Philadelphia:** The message Jesus had for Philadelphia was very different than the one He had for Laodicea. It appears that this church would soon face persecution. While they may have been perceived by themselves and others as little and weak, Jesus was pleased.

Jesus Christ, the Almighty Judge of men's hearts thought very differently of this little church. He recognized Philadelphia's works as they had remained dedicated to the Word and had not denied Him. They were instructed to hold fast as a sailor during a storm would hold tight the ropes. Jesus will rescue soon enough, just make sure that no one takes your crown. Just as the gates of Hell would not prevail against the Lord's Church, Jesus set before the Church at Philadelphia an open door. B.H. Carroll indicates in his Interpretation of the English Bible that the Church at Philadelphia was the last to survive and made it to the 1300's.

**The message to the Church at Laodicea:** We have lost sight of an important principle in our modern age. *If we are to really, truly unlock and open the door to Christ it must be through His Church.* Unfortunately, you would think that this was a new doctrine as we have really left this principle behind. I want everyone to carefully consider that the only way to live for Christ is through the organization that the Lord established - His Church.

**Jesus locked out of the Church:** The church at Philadelphia appears to have done so well in their dedication to Christ that they had an open door to Him. The Church at Laodicea had done such a poor job in serving Christ that He was locked out, and knocking to be let in. They were considered the church in the worst condition. I've been to churches and in services that it appears that Jesus had been locked out of the service. What a tragic picture that is written when we think of Jesus outside the church knocking to be let in. Charles Spurgeon said that "A sermon without Christ in it is like a loaf of bread without any flour in it (sermon 2899)". The same applies to the Lord's Church. Ruined salt that is only fit to be cast out and trodden.

### **Reasons to become a member of His Church:**

1. It is expected by Christ once you are saved
2. It is His plan as Jesus it to work through His church.
3. Jesus Christ give Himself for it.
4. We have access to Christ through His Church.
5. It's the only way that you can realistically grow and mature in the Lord.
6. We are His workmanship and not called to do our own thing.
7. Dedication to Christ is dedication to His Church.
8. The Church does not have an earthly origin.
9. It provides fellowship, assembly, teaching, and encouragement.

### **Problems with Laodicea:**

Jesus locked out: While it's obvious that this Church had locked out Jesus, there are many reasons listed that were indications of problems at this church. Just as Christ will not force Himself upon the lost, He also will not force Himself upon your church. Christ must be

actively sought after! **A Church needs to allow Jesus in as He wants fellowship with us.** We theologially spend significant time discussing who is going to be in the Bride of Christ, but we leave off the more important topic of how to better developing our relationship with Him.

Hiding things from Christ: Jesus may have been locked out of this Church, but He knew what they were doing. (Rev 3:15). He goes on to indicate little spiritual value of their accomplishments and that their efforts were going to be rejected. A church on fire lets Jesus in, a church that is cold should be convicted and repent. A lukewarm church is content to do nothing.

**No need for Christ:** The Laodicea Church thought that they were rich, increased with goods and needed nothing from the Lord. However, they were completely blind to their need. Jesus describes them as wretched, miserable, poor, blind and naked. The word wretched implies the Church being depraved and in slavery so much as they were working in the mines or stone quarries. Jesus wanted them to purchase from Him the spiritual things of God. He wanted them to be clothed with holiness. Jesus wanted them to see again.

**Christ's Love:** Jesus reaffirms His love for this Church. I'm rebuking you and chastening you because I love you. Therefore, be zealous and repent. I want to fellowship with you. Please open the door unto me if you overcome, I will grant you to set down with me in my throne. I also overcame.

**Conclusion:** The lesson provided here demonstrates many important biblical points.

First, it is our hope that we provide a tool for the saved to use to better study and understand God's Word. Increasingly, I've spoken with more and more people with heavier burdens concerned that we are destroying ourselves through an increasing lack of spiritually and knowledge. Hosea the prophet issues a warning that is relevant today. We, our ministries, and our children can be destroyed for a lack of knowledge. Let us affirm and strive to be sound in the faith.

*Hos 4:6 My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge: because thou hast rejected knowledge, I will also reject thee, that thou shalt be no priest to me: seeing thou hast forgotten the law of thy God, I will also forget thy children.*

Second, its important that we rightly divide the Word of Truth. God's Holy Spirit and our dedication to His word will help instruct us to right paths. We need to handle His word with utmost care and not like a drunken man trying to find his way home.

Third, if you expect an open door, you must follow Christ by working in His Church.



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Adam Clark on Laodicea “Ye are neither heathens nor Christians ~ neither good nor evil ~ neither led away by false doctrine, nor thoroughly addicted to that which is true. In a word, they were listless and indifferent, and seemed to care little whether heathenism or Christianity prevailed. Though they felt little Zeal either for the salvation of their own souls or that of others, yet they had such a general conviction of the truth and importance of Christianity, that they could not readily give it up. “ Clarks *Commentary- Volume VI - Romans to Revelation pg. 985*