

Checkin' Out My Walk  
#22 Philadelphia -1730-1900 AD - Open & Closed Doors

About 2,000 years ago, the apostle Paul strolled through the marketplace in ancient Athens where a plethora of altars dedicated to manmade gods offered Athenians a smorgasbord of pagan religions and lifestyles. History states there were about 30,000 idols in public places, plus what people had in their homes. An ancient proverb declared there were more idols in Athens than men. Wherever Paul looked, on pedestals, in temples and on street corners, were idol statues. In their eagerness to show tolerance for everything, the Athenians even had an altar "TO THE UNKNOWN GOD."

Acts 17:16-21 Now while Paul waited for them at Athens, his spirit was provoked within him when he saw that the city was given over to idols. Therefore he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and with the *Gentile* worshipers, and in the marketplace daily with those who happened to be there. Then certain Epicurean and Stoic philosophers encountered him. And some said, "What does this babbler want to say?" Others said, "He seems to be a proclaimer of foreign gods," because he preached to them Jesus and the resurrection. And they took him and brought him to the Areopagus, saying, "May we know what this new doctrine *is* of which you speak?"<sup>20</sup> For you are bringing some strange things to our ears. Therefore we want to know what these things mean. For all the Athenians and the foreigners who were there spent their time in nothing else but either to tell or to hear some new thing. Side Note: It was illegal to preach a foreign deity in Athens, so Paul's sermon was in fact a combination of a "guest lecture" and a trial.

He will emphasize the need to know God, rather than worshiping the unknown.

Acts 17:22-23 Then Paul stood in the midst of the Areopagus and said, "Men of Athens, I perceive that in all things you are very religious;<sup>23</sup> for as I was passing through and considering the objects of your worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. Therefore, the One whom you worship without knowing, Him I proclaim to you:

As Paul addressed the philosopher-inquisitors grilling him, he told them about the God, unknown to them, who was the ONE and ONLY SUPREME BEING.

Acts 17:24-25 God, who made the world and everything in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands. Nor is He worshiped with men's hands, as though He needed anything, since He gives to all life, breath, and all things.

Philadelphia (Brotherly Love; Faithful; Church of the Open Door or Missionary Movement) had so many pagan temples and shrines, people called it "Little Athens."  
It was a tough place to be a follower of Jesus.

1. Philadelphia, the youngest of the seven cities, was situated in Lydia along the Hermus River valley about 38 miles southeast of Sardis.

2. Built on the edge of a plain called "The Burned Land," it was backed by volcanic cliffs which made the land rich and fertile from the volcanic residue.

a. The soil was perfect for growing grapes—which meant wine.

3. Philadelphia was a center of the worship of the god of wine and revelry—Dionysus.

a. Dionysus, born of a virgin on Dec. 25, performed miracles and was resurrected.

b. He was known as the king of kings and alpha and omega.

c. His worship involved a rite practiced by the Maenad ("Raving Ones), the immortal female followers of Dionysus (god of ritual madness and ecstasy).

d. The Maenads were portrayed as inspired by Dionysus into a state of ecstatic frenzy through a combination of dancing and drunken intoxication.

e. Eating the flesh and drinking the blood of a deity figure predates Christianity.

The rite climaxed in a performance of frenzied feats of strength and madness, such as uprooting trees, tearing a bull (the symbol of Dionysus) apart with their bare hands, an act called sparagmos, and eating its flesh raw, an act called omophagia.

This latter rite was a sacrament akin to communion in which the participants assumed the strength and character of the god by symbolically eating the raw flesh and drinking the blood of his symbolic incarnation. Having symbolically eaten his body and drunk his blood, the celebrants became possessed by Dionysus.

4. All the extinct volcanoes meant Philadelphia was in an area prone for earthquakes.

a. The same earthquake that leveled Sardis in 17AD nearly destroyed Philadelphia due to the tremors and after-shocks for years.

b. Result > most moved outside the city walls and "commuted" inside to go to work.

c. They chose to live in huts outside the city in the open country.

d. Afraid if an aftershock hit, a wall might fall on them.

Note: allusion to this in the promise of 3:12, "and he will not go out from it anymore."

5. Philadelphia was a planned city.

a. It was situated where the borders of Mysia, Lydia and Phrygia met.

b. It was originally founded as a missionary outpost for Hellenism, the culture of ancient Greece. They intended to reach the frontiers of Lydia & Phrygia in hopes the barbaric tribes would become civilized as they adopted the Greek way of life.

Hocking: "The original purpose behind this key city was to make it a center for spreading Greek language, culture and manners throughout the Asian provinces."

c. By A.D. 19 the Lydians had forgotten their own Lydian language and were basically Greeks.

6. Philadelphia was a prosperous city.

Barclay: "Philadelphia, gateway from one continent to another, commanded one of the greatest highways in the world, the highway which led from Europe to the East.

Rev. 3:7-13 And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write, 'These things says He who is holy, He who is true, "He who has the key of David, He who opens and no one shuts, and shuts

and no one opens": <sup>8</sup> "I know your works. See, I have set before you an open door, and no one can shut it; for you have a little strength, have kept My word, and have not denied My name. <sup>9</sup> Indeed I will make *those* of the synagogue of Satan, who say they are Jews and are not, but lie—indeed I will make them come and worship before your feet, and to know that I have loved you. <sup>10</sup> Because you have kept My command to persevere, I also will keep you from the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth. <sup>11</sup> Behold, I am coming quickly! Hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown.

Rev. 1:18 I have the keys of Hades and of Death. He also has the Key Of David. He possesses ALL the keys. Therefore, He alone has the ability and prerogative of opening and shutting doors.

### Open & Closed Doors

Acts 16:11-40 Initially, Paul's plan was to revisit the churches founded on the "First Missionary Journey," but having completed this task:

1. Paul and his companions sought to preach the gospel in Asia, but they were "forbidden by the Holy Spirit." (Acts 16:6) > CLOSED DOOR
2. Next they sought to go into Bithynia, but the "Spirit of Jesus" would not permit this either (Acts 16:7). > CLOSED DOOR
3. When they reached Troas, Paul had a vision in the night. A Macedonian man was urging Paul to "come over to Macedonia and help us" (Acts 16:9). The next morning, they set sail for Macedonia. > OPEN DOOR > Birth of Church At Philippi

Focus on 3 individuals: Lydia, the seller of purple; the demon possessed slave girl who was a fortune teller; and the Philippian jailer.

#### A. Down by the Riverside Acts 16:11-15

Therefore, sailing from Troas, we (Paul, Silas, Timothy & Luke) ran a straight course to Samothrace, and the next *day* came to Neapolis, <sup>12</sup> and from there to Philippi (10 mile walk), which is the foremost city of that part of Macedonia, a colony. And we were staying in that city for some days. <sup>13</sup> And on the Sabbath day we went out of the city to the riverside, where prayer was customarily made (There was no synagogue > Need 10 men); and we sat down and spoke to the women who met *there*. <sup>14</sup> Now a certain woman named Lydia heard *us*. She was a seller of purple from the city of Thyatira, who worshiped God. The Lord opened her heart to heed the things spoken by Paul. (She responded to the news > Jesus is the Promised Messiah.) <sup>15</sup> And when she and her household were baptized, she begged *us*, saying, "If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come to my house and stay." So she persuaded us.

Note: The first Gentile convert in Macedonia is a woman.

Note: The rabbis said: "It is better that the words of the law be burned than be delivered to a woman!"

## B. Paul Liberates a Slave Woman, and It Costs a Fortune - Acts 16:16-24

Now it happened, as we went to prayer, that a certain slave girl possessed with a spirit of divination met us, who brought her masters much profit by fortune-telling.

Note: She was demon-possessed. The spirit that controlled her enabled her to foretell the future as a fortune teller. She made a fortune for those who owned her.

<sup>17</sup> This girl followed Paul and us, and cried out, saying, "These men are the servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to us the way of salvation."

Note: Why would she say this? Similar things took place during Jesus' earthly ministry.

Mark 1:24 "Leave us alone, Jesus the Nazarene! Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are - the Holy One of God!"

Isa. 14:14 I (Lucifer) will be like the Most High.'

Ponder: Why would one of Satan's minions introduce the preaching of the gospel by testifying to the sovereignty of his sworn enemy, the God of the universe?

Remember Balaam the (false) prophet who was hired by Balak, king of Moab, to curse the Israelites as they were about to enter the Promised Land (Num. 22-25). Balaam wanted to earn the fee for doing so, but every time he ended up blessing them (see Numbers 23:1-13). Balaam could not curse the Israelites because God had blessed them.

Consider: This slave girl was probably unable to say anything else. All she could do was speak the truth about Paul and the gospel he had come to preach.

<sup>18</sup> And this she did for many days The problem does not seem to be what she said, but rather the distraction she created by saying it over and over again. She became, in effect, a heckler, whose presence was annoying, to say the least.

But Paul, greatly annoyed, turned and said to the spirit, "I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her." And he came out that very hour.

Note: Why didn't Paul act sooner? Paul was not quick to confront the powers of hell, not because he lacked the power (in Christ) to do so, but this kind of spiritual warfare is something that he never took lightly. Some Christians speak lightly of Satan and his power: Jude 1:8-9 Likewise also these dreamers defile the flesh, reject authority, and speak evil of dignitaries. <sup>9</sup> Yet Michael the archangel, in contending with the devil, when he disputed about the body of Moses, dared not bring against him a reviling accusation, but said, "The Lord rebuke you!"

<sup>19</sup> But when her masters saw that their hope of profit was gone, (cost them a fortune) they seized Paul and Silas and dragged *them* into the marketplace to the authorities.

<sup>20</sup> And they brought them to the magistrates, and said, "These men, being Jews, exceedingly trouble our city; <sup>21</sup> and they teach customs which are not lawful for us, being Romans, to receive or observe."

Note: 1. The accusations were designed to play upon the anti-Jewish sentiments of the citizens of Philippi (no wonder there were few Jews in Philippi).

2. Accused of persuading people to oppose Roman law

<sup>22</sup> Then the multitude rose up together against them; (They persuaded the crowds to oppose them.) and the magistrates tore off their clothes and commanded *them* to be beaten with rods. <sup>23</sup> And when they had laid many stripes on them, they threw *them* into prison, commanding the jailer to keep them securely. <sup>24</sup> Having received such a charge, he put them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks.

Note: Beatings inflicted on them were illegal. In Acts 22, Paul asserted his rights as a Roman citizen and escaped a beating. Why did he endure a beating here? *He can endure this patiently, rejoicing in the privilege of suffering for Christ* (1 Peter 1:18-25; 4:12-14), evidenced by the hymns they were singing to God while in that prison.

It seems the beating could not be avoided in a way that would honor Christ.

Note: Virtual riot > entire crowd out of control. Any objections would have been futile.

### C. Beyond Escape Acts 16:25-33

But at midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them. <sup>26</sup> Suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened and everyone's chains were loosed.

<sup>27</sup> And the keeper of the prison, awaking from sleep and seeing the prison doors open, supposing the prisoners had fled, drew his sword and was about to kill himself.

<sup>28</sup> But Paul called with a loud voice, saying, "Do yourself no harm, for we are all here."

Note: Even when every door is opened and every chain is loosed, neither Paul nor Silas left. Escape was made easy, but no one fled. They could easily escape under cover of darkness. "Why didn't they escape?"

<sup>29</sup> Then he called for a light, ran in, and fell down trembling before Paul and Silas.

<sup>30</sup> And he brought them out and said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"

(Who told him he needed to be saved? - God prepared his heart.)

Consider: Why would the pagan inmates remain behind? The words they had heard sung and prayed were no empty claims. Their words had a ring of authority. They had rejoiced in their afflictions, and now God had miraculously provided "a way of escape."

They were as eager to know that answer to the jailer's question as he was.

<sup>31</sup> So they said, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household." <sup>32</sup> Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house.

<sup>33</sup> And he took them the same hour of the night and washed *their* stripes. And immediately he and all his *family* were baptized.

#### D. Freedom Offered - Acts 16:35-40 - Paul Refuses to Depart Secretly

<sup>35</sup> And when it was day, the magistrates sent the officers, saying, "Let those men go."

<sup>36</sup> So the keeper of the prison reported these words to Paul, saying, "The magistrates have sent to let you go. Now therefore depart, and go in peace." <sup>37</sup> But Paul said to them, "They have beaten us openly, uncondemned Romans, *and* have thrown *us* into prison. And now do they put us out secretly? No indeed! Let them come themselves and get us out."

1. Freedom from the prison was not of primary importance to Paul. IF they had escaped, they would have been fugitives from justice. The church in Phillippi would be subject to government oppression and further ministry in Philippi would have been restricted.

2. It was by REMAINING in the prison that God "opened the door" of the jailer's heart.

3. It now APPEARED to be an "open door" which would have granted Paul & Silas a legal release. But at what price?

<sup>38</sup> And the officers told these words to the magistrates, and they were afraid when they heard that they were Romans. <sup>39</sup> Then they came and pleaded with them and brought *them* out, and asked *them* to depart from the city.

1. As Roman citizens, they had been deprived of their rights.

The beating and imprisonment were illegal.

2. Magistrates were hoping they would silently slip out of town.

3. Paul stands up for what is best for the gospel and the new church.

4. In the future, Roman officials might feel the freedom to abuse Roman citizens who were Christians. The end result would be detrimental to the spread of the gospel.

5. Magistrates must publicly acknowledge their wrongdoing by making a public apology, thereby leaving Paul and Silas (and others) the right to travel freely among the churches in the empire.

6. Paul's "rights" are not the primary focus here, but what *is* right, for the advancement of the gospel throughout the Roman Empire.

Paul would later write to the church at Phillippi:

Phil. 1:12-13 But I want you to know, brethren, that the things *which happened* to me have actually turned out for the furtherance of the gospel, <sup>13</sup> so that it has become evident to the whole palace guard, and to all the rest, that my chains are in Christ;

Open and Closed Doors > Consider the following principles.

(1) God is the doorkeeper. He opens and closes doors. God may open a door for the gospel in a way we would never expect (like getting arrested, and being beaten and imprisoned when it is against the law).

(2) An "opportunity" is not necessarily an open door. When we speak of open and closed doors, we are referring to hearts that are prepared, and thus are open to the Word of God.

a. The opportunity for Paul and Silas to escape was not the "open door" God had indicated for Macedonia. The "open door" was the occasion to stay in the prison and to proclaim the gospel to the jailer and his household.

- b. When the magistrates sent the officers to inform the jailer he could release Paul and Silas, this may have looked like an "open door," a door through which to escape.
- c. But Paul would have none of this. He and Silas stayed in the prison until the magistrates came and apologized.
- d. Paul's concern was for the advancement of the gospel and for the well-being of the church. Thus he stayed until those responsible acknowledged their failure to administrate justice.

*(3) One can only know a closed door by first trying it. Have you ever had a boy or a girl come to your door and ask, "You don't want to buy any cookies, do you?" Some Christians conclude a door is closed before they have even tried to open it. Paul and Silas attempted to go to Asia, and then to Bithynia. They learned God had closed the door when they tried to open it. Many excuse their inaction by calling it a closed door, but they have never tried to enter it.*

*(4) An open door may only become evident after one has experienced some closed doors. It was not until after God had closed two doors that God revealed Macedonia as an open door. Some people are tempted to give up at the first closed door. God expects us to persevere until the open door is made known to us.*

*(5) Opposition is not necessarily an indication of a closed door: Acts 14:1-3*

The same thing happened in Iconium when Paul and Barnabas went into the Jewish synagogue and spoke in such a way that a large group of both Jews and Greeks believed. But the Jews who refused to believe stirred up the Gentiles and poisoned their minds against the brothers. So they stayed there for a considerable time, speaking out courageously for the Lord, who testified to the message of His grace, granting miraculous signs and wonders to be performed through their hands.

*(6) Closed doors may only be closed temporarily.*

Holy Spirit forbade Paul and his associates from preaching the Word in Asia (Acts 16:6). They will soon go to Ephesus and proclaim the Word for at least two years, impacting all Asia: Acts 19:8-10 ...so that all who dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks.

Likewise, the Spirit did not permit them to enter Bithynia, but we know God eventually did bring the gospel to these people: I Pet. 1:1-2

*(7) An open door leads to open hearts. God temporarily closed the door to Asia and Bithynia, but He opened the door in Macedonia. God opened hearts to the gospel being proclaimed.*

*(8) Doors Concerning My Enemies*

- a. The Lord opened the Red Sea to make His people pass through it. But He closed it when the Egyptians tried to use the way He had opened for His people. The way of escape for us will become a way of destruction for our enemies.

b. When Daniel was thrown into the lions' den, the Lord sent an angel and shut the mouth of the lions. The Lord shuts the doors through which the enemy tries to destroy us.

*(9) Our suffering may open a door of opportunity for the gospel.*

The suffering of our Lord on the cross of Calvary certainly "opened the door of salvation." Sometimes the Lord may lead us in a difficult path. At such times we should not try to escape it. When Jesus faced the cross, he did not run away from it. Peter tried to put up a resistance and cut off the right ear of the high priest's servant. Jesus told Peter to stop it. Jesus was willing to drink the cup which His Father had given him. He did not call the cross as a cup given by the devil or his enemies. He called it a cup which His Father had given him. He was willing to follow the path in which His Father was leading him. Even in our own lives we should not try to escape from the path of suffering when the Lord leads us through it. We should not close a door that the Lord has opened for us.

I Pet. 3:14-15 But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, *you are* blessed.

"And do not be afraid of their threats, nor be troubled." <sup>15</sup> But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always *be* ready to *give* a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you,

Some pray to be delivered from sickness, pain, and suffering. Should we not rather pray:

1. Whether through our sufferings or through our deliverance, may God be glorified and sinners drawn to faith in Jesus Christ?

2. Should we not ask God to give us the grace and hope we need in times of suffering, so we will stand apart from the lost, who have no hope? When suffering unavoidably comes our way, look for open doors created by suffering in a godly way.

I Pet. 2:20-21 For what credit *is it* if, when you are beaten for your faults, you take it patiently? But when you do good and suffer, if you take it patiently, this *is* commendable before God. <sup>21</sup> For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps.

How Can I Know If An Open Door Is From God?

1. The Door God Opens Will Never Contradict His Word

a. Many Christians see opportunities to make more money as an open door from God, even though the opportunity means the job will keep them from regular fellowship or service in their church. However, God's Word tells us not to neglect meeting together for worship. Hebrews 10:25 not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as *is* the manner of some, but exhorting *one another*, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.

b. Some believe God opened a door to a dating relationship even though it meant being in a situation where they were "unequally yoked" with an unbeliever, which Scripture also warns against (II Corinthians 6:14).



Truth: God will not lead you toward an opportunity that contradicts what He clearly says in His Word. He will not open a door that would require personal compromise or disobedience in order for you to enter.

Note: As humans prone to sin, we have an excellent way of turning a clear mandate of God's completely around and justifying it by our circumstances.

Truth: If there is a compromise in any way, or we have to bend Scripture to justify our "open door," it is likely not a door God is opening for us.

Note: Anything that contradicts His Word a temptation, rather than an open door from God. God's Word clearly says God does not tempt us.

James 1:13-14 Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am tempted by God" for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone.

## 2. The Door God Opens Will Require You to Depend on Him

God will not give us something that will alienate us from Him or make us believe we no longer need Him. As a God of relationship, He insists upon being first in our lives.

Matt. 6:33 But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.

If you find yourself saying "I can't do this unless God goes before me," or "I can do this, but only with God's help and leading," it's likely something God is calling you to do.

Hebrews 11:6 But without faith *it is* impossible to please *Him*, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and *that* He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.

Many times an "open door" from God is one that allows our faith to be stretched and strengthened. That, after all, is God's objective for us: to grow in faith and Christ-likeness.

Take your opportunity or "open door" to God and ask for his confirmation - through his Word and for His peace in the decision. You can have the assurance you aren't just choosing a door at random, but you're carefully walking through the ones He wants you to enter.

Ps. 37:23 The steps of a *good* man are ordered by the LORD, And He delights in his way.

Ps. 25:12 Who is the man who reverently fears *and* worships the Lord? Him shall He teach in the way that he should choose.

Ps. 37:31 The law of his God is in his heart; none of his steps shall slide.