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PHILADELPHIA -- THE FAITHFUL CURCH

WHAT JESUS THINKS OF HIS CHURCH

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Scripture Reading – Revelation 3:7-13

Introduction

The city of Philadelphia was the centre of a fertile grape growing which produced wines. It was situated in a volcanic area which made it a dangerous place to live, and as result it was called the “city of full of earthquakes.” It has been said that the city was established in order that it would become the center of the spreading of the Greek language and culture across the world of that day. Within this city was the church of Jesus Christ. It was the sixth church to which Jesus directed his message. Like the church in Smyrna there was no call to repentance. Godet noted that “No church receives higher praise than the church in Philadelphia.” (Preachers Comm. P. 480. Vol.30.) It is clear that this church had a good deal in common with the church in Smyrna. Both received no blame only high praise. Both suffered from those who called themselves Jews and were not. Both were persecuted it would seem by the Romans. Both are given the assurance that the

opposition is Satanic and both are promised a crown. Jesus commends the church on her healthy condition. The truths which are emphasized in Christ's message to the Church at Philadelphia are extremely important to the church as a whole. We discover what the church should be, not only from the critical evaluation Jesus makes of the churches, but also the positive commendation He gives to them. As we study this passage of scripture the first truth that is vital in this message to the faithful church in Philadelphia is noted by John. It is fundamental – it is foundational. It is;

1. THE SOVEREIGNTY OF THE LORD JESUS CHRIST. Revelation 3:7.

This truth establishes and confirms His indisputable position of authority in the church. **"These are the words of Him who is holy and true, who holds the key of David. What He opens, no one can shut; and what He shuts no one can open...."** This is the Sovereign Lord speaking to His church. This is the disclosure of Himself to His persecuted church. He presents Himself as one who is in control of the church. He holds the key of David. What doors He opens, no man can shut, and what doors He shuts no man can close. The circumstances with which we may be confronted may appear to be out of control, but He Himself is in complete control. He not only holds the reigns of His church; He holds the reins of the cosmic world. He is omnipotent or all powerful. His authority has been challenged all down history, but it has made no difference to it. His sovereignty remains untouched by the futile attempts of men to deny, denigrate or destroy it. Our God remains unchanged and strong. Jesus is the same yesterday, today and forever. What then are the basic characteristics of His Sovereignty? The first we should mention is

a.His Holiness. Revelation 3:7. "These are the words of Him who is holy and true." The Lord of His church is reminding His flock not only of who He is but what He is. He is the Lord who is holy. The holiness of Jesus is more than attribute it is who He is. God is described as thrice holy, which refers to the Trinity. It is a title of His deity. He is Holy! Holy! Holy! No other attribute is described in this way. He is never referred to as Love! Love! Love! Or Mercy!

Mercy! Mercy! and He is all of that. It is only in relation to His holiness is it stated three times. Holiness is who He is. He is essentially holy. It is the title of Deity. The prophecy of Isaiah 43:15 the Lord Himself says, "I am the Lord your Holy One, Israel's creator, your King...." Holiness is the distinctive characteristic of the living God. Moses was extremely aware of this. Praising God for the miraculous deliverance from the Pharaoh's army at the Red Sea, Moses sang and exalted the holiness of God "Who is among the gods is like you O Lord? Who is like you majestic in holiness – awesome in glory working wonders? Holiness is a distinctive disclosure of the majestic greatness of God. The eternal song of heaven resounds triumphantly in the courts of God. "Holy! Holy! Holy! Is the Lord God Almighty who was, and is to come?" Revelation 4:8.

It is so easy to get caught up and carried away with the prophetic word in the book of the Revelation and neglect the glory of the holiness of God, which is the heart beat of lifestyle of heaven. If you eliminate the holiness of God in this book everything else is futility and emptiness. Jesus stands before His Church revealing who He is. "These are the words of Him who is holy....." His holiness is His glory. This truth must be understood and settled before we go on to anything else. But His Sovereignty is not only marked by holiness but also by, **b. Genuiness Revelation 3:7. These are the words of Him who is holy and true...." What we should note here is that truth and holiness and truth are compatible.** Truth flows from holiness. **Holiness is the foundation of truth.** There are two words in the Greek that are translated true. The first describes a statement that is true, and not false. The second word means true in the sense of real or genuine as apposed to that which is an allusion or that which is deceptive. It is in this latter sense that Jesus is described as real and genuine. (Barclay) One has observed that "when we are confronted with Jesus Christ, we are confronted with no shadowy outline and image of the truth, but with the truth itself. Jesus not only spoke the message of truth, He himself said "I am the Truth....." He is not a substitute God who is genuine. But the Son of God is not only marked by holiness and truth but also by,

b. Absoluteness. Revelation 3:7. These are the words of Him who is holy and true, who holds the key of David. What He opens, no one can shut; and what He shuts, no one can open." The key which Jesus holds is the badge of absolute

authority. Jesus has already declared His authority in Revelation 1:18. "I hold the keys of death and Hades." He is not only in control in and over life but also

death. **Death could not hold Him in the tomb. The grave had to release its grip on Him. He is absolute in His authority.** The phrase "the keys of David is a

quotation from the prophecy of Isaiah 22:22. It takes us back to where God's prophet thundered against a certain official named Shebna. Havner points out that he was a politician and a crook, **feathering his own nest, and God threw him out** with a vengeance and in his place He installed Eliakim He had been made steward over King Hezekiah's household. God gave him this authority, calling him the "a father to the inhabitants of Jerusalem and to the house of Judah."

(Stott) of who it was said, "I will place on His shoulder the key to the house of David; what He opens no can shut, and what he shuts no one can open."

Eliakim was a type of Christ. He foreshadowed Jesus. Jesus is the head of the household of God – the church. The writer to the Hebrews observed "Christ is faithful as a son over God's house. Hebrews 3:6. Jesus Himself declared to His disciples "All authority in heaven and earth has been given to me." "He has the keys of authority in His hands." He opens the door to salvation – He unlocks the gates to the unsearchable riches and bountiful resources of God - He opens the doors of opportunity for service. He has the keys of David. There is absoluteness about His authority. The Sovereignty of Jesus is characterized by holiness, genuineness and absoluteness. The second truth which is part of the message of Jesus to Philadelphia emphasizes,

2. THE CAPACITY OF CHRIST'S CHURCH. Revelation 3:8.

This refers to the potential of the Christ's church in Philadelphia. Jesus tells His church "I have placed before you an open door that no one can shut. I know that you have little strength, yet you have kept my word and have not denied my

name." Jesus is accentuating the capacity of the church. It seems that the capacity the church can be described as,

a.Feebleness. Revelation 3:8. Jesus said "I know that you have little strength, yet you have kept my word and have denied my Name." The Philadelphian church might not have recognized its capacity. All they saw was their limited strength or weakness. In spite of their feebleness they had kept His word and not denied the name of Jesus. The implication is that at sometime the church had been through some intense fire, yet regardless of their limited strength they had come through victoriously. On the human level not much would be made of the weakness of the church. The world would say that this weakness – this minimal strength is not enough to withstand the powers of evil. The world would view it as a negative. But the spirit in the words of Jesus, indicate that God sees the positive in what the human mind would consider to be a negative factor. God is not anxious about the little strength. We would highlight the little in the strength, whereas God would highlight the strength in the little. While we would only see that the church had little strength, whereas Jesus would delight to see that it was vital that there was any strength at all. From God's point of view a little strength is better than no strength. The feebleness of the church is God's opportunity to perfect and display His power.

b.Church history tells a story which we cannot ignore, and seems that we have failed to learn the lesson it has presented to us. When the church has been deprived of many resources and faced persecution, it has been the most effective and has grown the most. When the church has had a multitude of resources; refined its strategies and when it is busy about building church machinery and designing plans it becomes muscle bound and struggles to move forward. This is not simply an opinion it is an observation of church history. The question to which we should give our attention is this "Does everything we do make us more dependent on God?" "Does it lead us to lean more on God?" It can, but the predominance of the facts of church history draw a different picture. Does what we do make us more dependent on human ingenuity and strength?

God is not limited by the little strength. It does not bind God's power for it is in that weakness that God's power is made perfect and reveals its mighty working. Paul once wrote that it was in his weakness that he was made strong. The conclusion here is significant. Feebleness is no excuse for disloyalty to Christ and giving up on our faith. It is no reason for despair or defeat. There is capacity and potential in the little strength of our humanity. The church though feeble showed great,

c.Faithfulness. Revelation 3:8. "You have little strength YET you have kept my word and have not denied my Name." The church had been under severe stress but had not lost its hold on the gospel and the Lord Jesus Christ. The light was still flashing albeit weakly. There is something quite magnificent about a faithfulness which is active in spite of little strength. We tend to look for the exciting – the sensational – the great spiritual event – the outstanding talent – great numbers all of which may have their place. It is interesting however that God highlights with disturbing frequency, and indeed consistently that seeming lack luster quality of a quiet consistent faithfulness which is active in spite of little strength. This quality does not parade its virtue before the masses nor boast of its importance before the crowds. But it is a quality that God searches for and highlights. When I was president of the Bible College in South Africa I was privileged to meet and teach some of the choicest young people anywhere. I remember sitting in my office one day and there was a knock on the door there stood one of my students. She requested permission to come in and invited her to sit down. She was beautiful slender young woman who was about 19 years old and who was a radiant Christian. Her face literally shone with the joy of her relationship with Christ. But that day I could tell that something was wrong. Her face was troubled. She confided that she had a problem she wanted to share with her president. There was vulnerability about her that was striking. Her name was Maria Zuke. She had recently been saved and had felt a call to fulltime service. She was an intelligent young woman who was a vital Christian. But the sparkle in her eyes was gone and was very troubled. As we talked together the

tears coursed down her cheeks. Both of her parents were witchdoctors. She had received a message that she was to return home that very weekend to take part in satanic rituals, and worship the ancestral spirits. But that was not the crucial issue with her. She knew as a Christian she could not involve herself in those activities. I think the real agony lay that she had been informed that if she refused to go, she would be disowned by her parents. As she relayed this to me she wept. "What should I do?" she asked. That is the difficult question. There is no easy answer. I looked at her so vulnerable and full of fear. I knew what it would mean. No parents! No home! – No security! I tried to help her but words seemed so inadequate. And then I said to her Maria, God is your heavenly Father. If you will accept it, InKosikazi and I will be happy to be your earthly parents. But the decision to go to the witchdoctors activities will have to be yours. She left my office a lonely and sad figure. I knew the intensity of her pain and the enormity of what she had to face. She made her decision. **In her youth and vulnerability and inexperience she stood firm. She surmounted her difficulty and kept her faith.** It turned out that God stepped in. Her parents did not renounce her.

This quality of faithfulness is indispensable to our Christian faith and witness. Jesus said to the church at Philadelphia "You have kept my word and have not denied my name." The church had the capacity to hold its witness even though she had a little strength.

Now Jesus talks about

3. THE SECURITY OF GOD'S PEOPLE. Revelation 3:10.

Jesus said "Since you have kept my command to endure patiently, I will also keep you from the hour of trial that is going to come upon the whole world to test those who live on the earth." Jesus is talking about the believers

a. Present Security. Revelation 3:10-12.

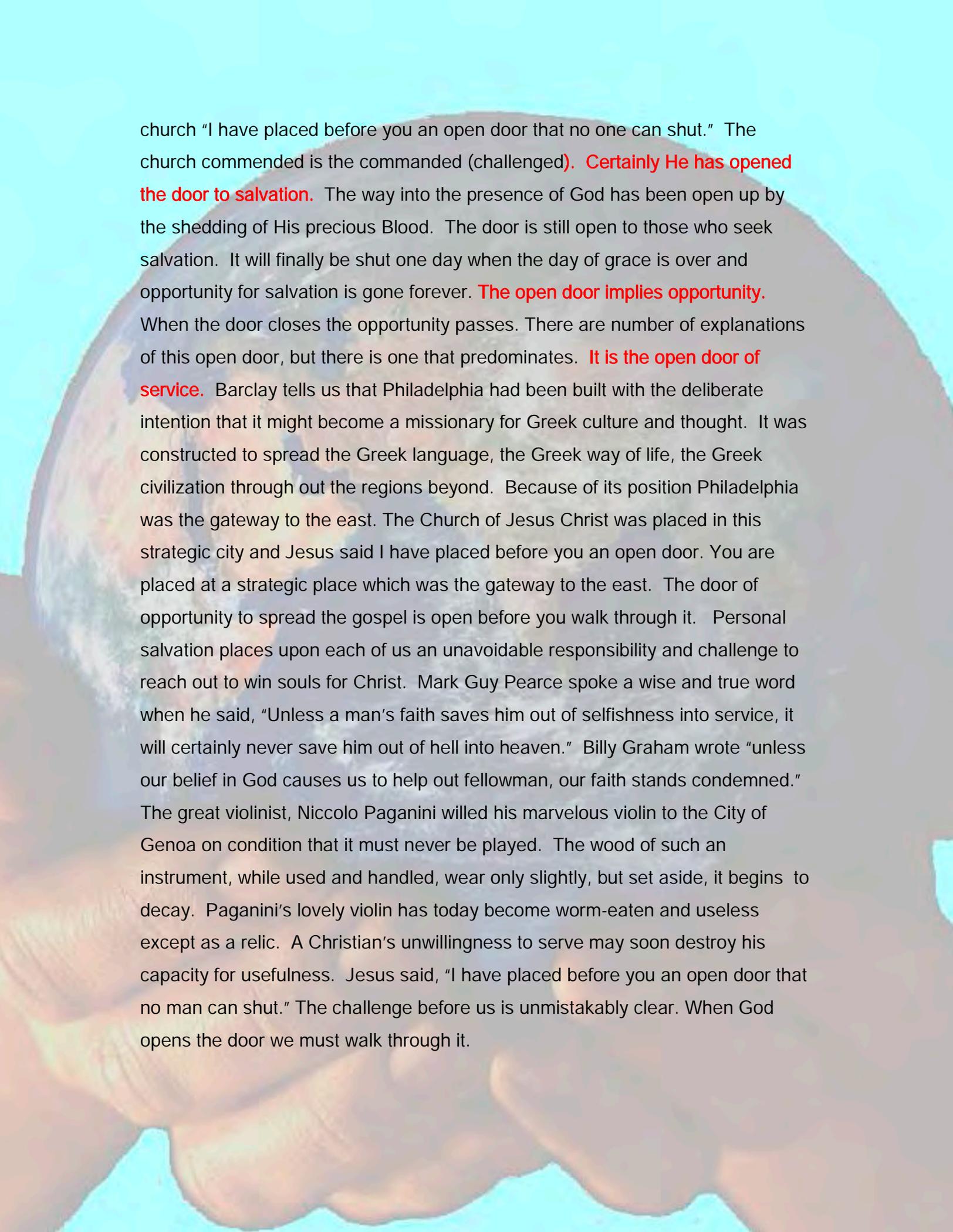
The Greek rendering could mean "keep you from undergoing the trial." Or "keep you right through the trial." Moffet chose the latter meaning. "I will keep you safe through the hour of trial." John Stott also accepts this meaning when he said

"Had the church kept Christ's word, then He would keep them. He would not spare them from suffering; but He would uphold them in it." Harry Ironside stated that salvation was like Noah inviting a pagan in his day to place his trusting God's Word and come into the ark. Some view salvation like Noah offering to put a peg on the outside of the ark. "If you just hang on through the storm, you'll be saved." The security which we enjoy is not only dependent on holding to the faith, but trusting God to keep us safe in the trial. We must be in the ark of salvation to have the assurance of safety. If we keep Christ's word He will keep us safe in the hour of the storm. Jesus said "Hold on to what you have, so that no one will take your crown." Then Jesus proceeds to talk about,

b. The Future Security. Revelation 3:10-12. The assurance of security in this life is the promise of security in the next. While this future security is not automatic. It can be certain. Note the words of Jesus "I am coming soon. Hold on to what have, so that no one will take your crown. Him who overcomes I will make a pillar in the temple of my God. Never again will he leave it I will write on him the name of my God and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which is coming down from heaven from my God; I will also write on him my new name. Again note the phrases "Keeping my Word!" "Hold On!" "He who overcomes I will make him a pillar." The blessings of a secure eternal future are promised, but they are preceded by the conditions. Following a campaign speech, a young man rushed up to Senator Everet Dirkson and said, Senator, I wouldn't vote for you if you were St Peter. Dirkson eyed the young man for a moment, then said; "Son, if I were St. Peter, you couldn't vote for me, because you wouldn't be in my district. The privilege of voting for Dirkson was conditioned on what district the voter was resident. The privilege of heaven lies with those who fulfill the conditions.

Conclusion

Jesus Christ who is Sovereign in His church commends her on her faithful loyalty. But in the commendation He presents her with a challenge. The one who has the keys of David in His Hand, has unlocked a door, and He says to His



church "I have placed before you an open door that no one can shut." The church commended is the commanded (challenged). **Certainly He has opened the door to salvation.** The way into the presence of God has been open up by the shedding of His precious Blood. The door is still open to those who seek salvation. It will finally be shut one day when the day of grace is over and opportunity for salvation is gone forever. **The open door implies opportunity.** When the door closes the opportunity passes. There are number of explanations of this open door, but there is one that predominates. **It is the open door of service.** Barclay tells us that Philadelphia had been built with the deliberate intention that it might become a missionary for Greek culture and thought. It was constructed to spread the Greek language, the Greek way of life, the Greek civilization through out the regions beyond. Because of its position Philadelphia was the gateway to the east. The Church of Jesus Christ was placed in this strategic city and Jesus said I have placed before you an open door. You are placed at a strategic place which was the gateway to the east. The door of opportunity to spread the gospel is open before you walk through it. Personal salvation places upon each of us an unavoidable responsibility and challenge to reach out to win souls for Christ. Mark Guy Pearce spoke a wise and true word when he said, "Unless a man's faith saves him out of selfishness into service, it will certainly never save him out of hell into heaven." Billy Graham wrote "unless our belief in God causes us to help out fellowman, our faith stands condemned." The great violinist, Niccolo Paganini willed his marvelous violin to the City of Genoa on condition that it must never be played. The wood of such an instrument, while used and handled, wear only slightly, but set aside, it begins to decay. Paganini's lovely violin has today become worm-eaten and useless except as a relic. A Christian's unwillingness to serve may soon destroy his capacity for usefulness. Jesus said, "I have placed before you an open door that no man can shut." The challenge before us is unmistakably clear. When God opens the door we must walk through it.