



# Potomac Hills

## Presbyterian Church, PCA



By Grace Alone ~ Through Faith Alone ~ In Christ Alone

The Reverend Dr. David V. Silvernail, Jr.  
Revelation 3:7-13

December 13, 2009  
English Standard Version

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### *“The Church of Persevering Witness”*

This is the 11<sup>th</sup> sermon in the series on The Book of Revelation entitled,  
*“The King’s Triumphant Return.”*

#### **Revelation 3:7-13**

*“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.’<sup>8</sup> ‘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.’<sup>9</sup> 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.’<sup>10</sup> 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.’<sup>11</sup> I am coming soon. Hold fast what you have, so that no one may seize your crown.’<sup>12</sup> 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.’<sup>13</sup> He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”*

*Heavenly Father, thank You for making us Your people. As we look at the church in Philadelphia, please help us. We know we’re **not** enough like this church. We don’t know how we would handle persecution. We don’t know if we would keep Your word and not deny You. We don’t know if we would be able to hold fast to the gospel. So Lord, help us to meet Jesus as we see Him in these words. Do this for each of us, this morning, in Jesus’ good name. Amen.*

## INTRODUCTION: *How to Sing the Blues.* <sup>1</sup>

If you've ever wondered "How to Sing the Blues," then I have the instructions for you right here. So pay attention ... so you'll know how to do this someday when it becomes necessary ... Which it might.

1. Most Blues begin, "Woke up this morning."
  2. "I got a good woman" is a bad way to begin the Blues, 'less you stick something nasty in the next line, like "I got a good woman, with the meanest face in town."
  3. The Blues is simple. After you get the first line right, repeat it. Then find something that rhymes ... sort of: "Got a good woman - with the meanest face in town. Got teeth like Margaret Thatcher - and she weigh 500 pound."
  4. The Blues are not about choice. You stuck in a ditch, you stuck in a ditch; ain't no way out.
  5. Blues cars are Chevys and Cadillacs and broken-down trucks. Blues don't travel in Volvos, BMWs, or SUVs. Most Blues transportation is a Greyhound bus or a southbound train. Walkin' plays a major part in the blues lifestyle. So does fixin' to die.
  6. Teenagers can't sing the Blues. T hey ain't fixin' to die yet. Adults sing the Blues. In Blues, " adulthood" means being old enough to get the electric chair if you shoot a man in Memphis.
  7. Blues can take place in New York City but not in Hawaii or any place in Canada. Hard times in St. Paul or Tucson is just depression. Chicago, St. Louis, and Kansas City still the best places to have the Blues. You cannot have the blues in any place that don't get rain.
  8. A man with male pattern baldness ain't the blues. A woman with male pattern baldness is. Breaking your leg cuz you skiing is not the blues. Breaking your leg cuz an alligator be chomping on it is.
  9. You can't have no Blues in an office or a shopping mall. The lighting is wrong. Go outside to the parking lot or sit by the dumpster.
  10. Blues is not a matter of color. It's a matter of bad luck. Tiger Woods cannot sing the blues. [Though that may have changed recently]
  11. Good places for the Blues: highway ... jailhouse ... bottom of a whiskey glass. Bad places for the Blues: gallery openings ... golf courses ... any Ivy League institution.
  12. Do you have the right to sing the Blues?
    - Yes, if you're older than dirt; No, if you have all your teeth;
    - Yes, if you're blind; No, if you were once blind but now can see;
    - Yes, if you shot a man in Memphis; No, if the man in Memphis lived.
  13. Some Blues names for women: Sadie, Bessie, Big Mama.
  14. Some Blues names for men: Willie, Little Willie, Big Willie.
  15. Persons with names like Sierra, Sequoia, and Rainbow can't sing the Blues no matter how many men they shoot in Memphis.
- So ... if you ever get the blues, now you know how to sing.
- The church in Philadelphia could have used this information ... because if ever a church wanted to sing the blues, it was probably this one. One look at this church and you could tell it

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**1 The Introduction is adapted (and heavily edited) from "How to Sing the Blues",** courtesy of Red, Hot, and Blue restaurant in Leesburg. Original attributed to Memphis Earlene Gray (stage name for Judith Podell, author of [Blues for Beginners and Other Obsessions](#). If you Google "How to Sing the Blues", you can find the full version.

didn't have much going for it. It was small, weak, and constantly under attack. And all the couples there were named Willie and Bessie.

And so that brings us to our text this morning, which was written to the church in Philadelphia. But it was written by the only One able to understand their situation, the only One able to address their situation. And that, of course, is ...

**v. 7: THE LORD JESUS CHRIST**<sup>2</sup>

*“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.’”*

The One who is holy and true speaks to this church. The fire and light radiating from the Son of Man in the opening vision of Revelation 1 symbolizes divine holiness. Jesus is alluding to the Old Testament name of God, Yahweh, the Holy One of Israel.

In **Revelation 1:17-18** we see that Jesus holds the keys, *“When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. But he laid his right hand on me, saying, ‘Fear not, I am the first and the last,<sup>18</sup> and the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades.’”*

The reference to the power of the keys, the authority to let in and cast out of the kingdom, may be due to the fact that a number of the Christians in Philadelphia had been excommunicated from the Jewish synagogue once they became Christians. But the Jews of the synagogue do not hold the true keys to the kingdom of God and cannot let in or cast out. Only Christ has that authority.

And the One with authority, the One who holds the keys, gives this church some amazing

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**v. 8: WORDS OF APPROVAL**

*“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.”*

One feature about the city of Philadelphia was that the city was destroyed by an earthquake in 17 AD, along with Sardis and other cities in the surrounding region. Most of the others recovered rather quickly from the disaster, but the after-shocks continued in Philadelphia for quite a number of years, with the result that the people had to flee the city repeatedly. This frightened rhythm of flight and return had become part of their lives.

After awhile Tiberius Caesar helped Philadelphia to recover from the earthquake, and out

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**2 The Exposition of the text is adapted from the books:**

*Triumph of the Lamb* by Dr. Dennis Johnson, pages 85-89; *Discipleship on the Edge* by Dr. Darrell Johnson, pages 106-113; *New Testament Commentary: Revelation* by Dr. Simon Kistemaker, pages 156-166; *Seven Deadly Spirits: Revelation's Letters for Today's Church* by Dr. T. Scott Daniel, pages 105-115; *The New International Greek Testament Commentary: Revelation* by Dr. Gregory Beale, pages 283ff; *The Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia Minor in their Local Settings* by Dr. Colin Hemer, pages 153-177; *To the One Who Conquers: 50 Daily Meditations on the Seven Letters of Revelation 2-3* by Dr. Sam Storms, pages 161-188.

**And the sermons:**

*“The Revelation of Jesus Christ (Part 3)”* by Mark Driscoll, Mars Hill Church, Seattle, WA, 9/7/08; *“To The Church in Philadelphia”* by Dr. Kim Riddlebarger, Christ Reformed Church, Anaheim, CA, 2002, [www.christreformed.org](http://www.christreformed.org); *“The Power of the Weak on Behalf of the Helpless”* by Dr. Robert Rayburn, Faith Presbyterian Church, Tacoma, WA, 10/19/08; *“The Little Church That Could”* by Rev. Charlie Baile, Shady Grove Presbyterian Church, Derwood, MD, 10/9/08

of gratitude the city changed its name to “Neocaesarea” (New Caesar), and it bore that name for about 30 years, until the city was renamed “Flavia” in honor of Emperor Vespasian, also called Flavianus. But the local residents still called the city Philadelphia, even though the city’s name officially had been changed twice. I mention these facts because they have a bearing on the promises to the church in this letter, as we will see.

As a result, the city was dependent on Rome and its economy was weak. Both Smyrna and Philadelphia lacked resources — the one was poor and Jesus says this church had little power. The church here had much in common with Smyrna. In his commentary on Revelation, Dr. Leon Morris says, “Both receive no blame, only praise. Both suffered from those who called themselves Jews and were not, both were persecuted by the Romans, both are assured that the opposition is satanic, and both are promised a crown.”

However, what was little and inconsequential in the world’s eyes was precious to Jesus. Jesus makes it clear that He loves this church. “*You have but little power*” is probably a reference to this church having little power, having little influence, and having little size. It wasn’t a megachurch; it was more like a mini-church. They lacked resources, manpower, money, talents, and gifts. But they were a church much loved by Jesus.

Here Jesus says, in one of the harder verses to understand in this chapter, that “*I have set before you an open door, which no one is able to shut.*” Verses 7-8 are a reference to **Isaiah 22:20-22**, “*In that day I will call my servant Eliakim the son of Hilkiah, <sup>21</sup> and I will clothe him with your robe, and will bind your sash on him, and will commit your authority to his hand. And he shall be a father to the inhabitants of Jerusalem and to the house of Judah. <sup>22</sup> And I will place on his shoulder the key of the house of David. He shall open, and none shall shut; and he shall shut, and none shall open.*”

The language of Isaiah is used to present Christ as the Davidic Messiah with absolute power to control entrance to the heavenly kingdom. But the Jews of John’s day apparently interpreted this prophecy to refer to their own authority to shut the synagogue to those Jews who had become Christians and were subsequently excommunicated. Since the Jews claimed the authority to shut the assembly to Christians, Christ now cites the same passage to demonstrate that it’s He, not they, who determines membership and entrance into the true assembly, which is His church.

And so the door here is the door into the Kingdom of God, which cannot be shut against them even when the synagogue of Satan repudiates them. The persecution here was mainly from the Jews. They probably referred to Jesus as a false Messiah. Jesus comes here and shows He is the sovereign and holy and true Messiah. Jesus acts firmly and decisively and no one can stay His hand. Since the Jews claimed to have shut the door to the messianic kingdom to those who came to embrace Jesus as Israel’s Messiah, Jesus now tells them that He has placed before the Philadelphia church an open door which cannot be shut.

There are two very different interpretations of the “*open door.*” Some take it to mean that the believers in Philadelphia will not fail to enter the eschatological kingdom of the Lord, will not fail to enter heaven; in other words. Jesus has opened the door for them and no one can shut it.

Others, building their case on the use of this imagery elsewhere in the Bible, take it to mean that the Lord has set before the church in Philadelphia a great opportunity to make the gospel known to their contemporaries. I’m not sure that we actually have to choose between the two; the same door that the Philadelphia believers have entered through is open to others. But,

all in all, the second interpretation is more likely, I think, partly because the statement about the open door immediately follows the Lord's statement that he knows their works — the open door has to do with what these Christians are doing and ought to do — that is, testify to the name and power of Christ. The church's witness will lead to the salvation of others.

In any case, an *“open door”* is a familiar way of speaking about missionary opportunity. When Paul and Barnabas returned from their first missionary tour, we read in **Acts 14:27**, *“And when they arrived and gathered the church together, they declared all that God had done with them, and how he had **opened a door** of faith to the Gentiles.”* In **1 Corinthians 16:9** Paul tells the Corinthian Christians that *“**a wide door for effective work has opened to me ...**”* in Ephesus, necessitating a longer stay in that city. And when he left for Troas, Paul says in **2 Corinthians 2:12**, *“**a door was opened for me in the Lord...**”* And he asks the Colossian Christians, **Colossians 4:3**, *“At the same time, pray also for us, that God may **open to us a door for the word, to declare the mystery of Christ, on account of which I am in prison.**”*

Next Jesus gives this church ...

#### v. 9-10: **HOPE**

Here Jesus criticizes the Jewish synagogue and their treatment of this church. He says, *“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.”*<sup>10</sup> *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.”*

The Apostle Paul addressed this in **Romans 2:28-29**, *“For no one is a Jew who is merely one outwardly, nor is circumcision outward and physical.”*<sup>29</sup> *But a Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter. His praise is not from man but from God.”*

Furthermore it's prophesied several times in Isaiah that **Gentiles** will come and bow down before **Israel** in the last days. One such example is **Isaiah 60:14**, *“The sons of those who afflicted you shall come bending low to you, and all who despised you shall bow down at your feet; they shall call you the City of the Lord, the Zion of the Holy One of Israel.”*

The irony here is that in Isaiah it is the **Gentiles** who bend low before **Israel**, whereas in Revelation 3:9 it is the **Jews** who will bow at the feet of this predominantly **Gentile Christian church**. The *“open door”* is the door of missionary opportunity that stands open before the church in Philadelphia: opportunity to reach both Jews and Gentiles. That's how the apostles expected the mission to the Gentiles to work: Christ's mercy, extended to the Gentiles in the Gospel, evokes envy among the Jews, who by God's severe mercy are re-grafted by faith into the tree of God's covenant people.

This explains the surprising reversal in verse 9, the unbelieving Jews will come and fall down at the feet of the church — Jewish and Gentile Christians together — and acknowledge that **their** God is the true God and that Christ is the Messiah. It is a grand picture of the progress of the gospel penetrating even the most determined and obstinate resistance.

As far as the last sentence goes, this is another tough one to understand. Jesus says, *“I will keep you from the hour of trial that is coming on the whole world, to try those who dwell on the earth.”* In this verse we have the only mention in the seven letters of the coming worldwide ordeal which is a major theme of the rest of the book.

You may be aware that this verse is often referred to as evidence for the idea of the rapture, the sudden and unannounced removal of all believers from the world before the great

tribulation at the end of the world, before the Second Coming of Christ. This is one of the big “rapture” verses in the Bible; in fact, this verse is the most important verse in the book of Revelation for the dispensational scheme of biblical interpretation. The *Left Behind* books trade on this expectation of a rapture of the church.

Many Christians look at this verse and think that God is going to deliver His church and take them out of “*the hour of trial*” and completely remove them from suffering. I understand where this view is coming from and if it happens I’ll welcome it. However, Christians differ on this, and I’m one of them. I think that a “rapture” during a time of trials is contradictory to what the entire rest of the Bible teaches. First of all, it doesn’t take away from **the four essentials of eschatology**:

1. I know He’s coming,
2. I don’t know when,
3. I better be ready, and
4. In the end, He wins (and thus, we win too).

The language employed here does not mean — and the rest of the Bible **never teaches** — that the church will be evacuated before the tribulation. It means that she will be kept, preserved, protected **in and through** all her trials and especially the last and greatest trial. Many scholars make the argument that this verse means that “God is going to keep you from **apostasy** in the midst of the trial. God is going to protect you **spiritually** during the physical out-pouring of His wrath upon the whole earth.” That’s very possible, since trials are often spiritual and not physical. As we’ve seen in the other letters, if Satan can defeat us with idolatry and immorality, then there’s no need to resort to persecution.

And there’s a ton of other verses that speak to this idea of an “*hour of trial*” as a period of testing and tribulation that precedes the establishment of the eternal kingdom. If you remember when we went through Thessalonians last summer, all of **2 Thessalonians 2** was about this and it seemed to indicate a spiritual battle being waged against the saints much more than a physical battle.

Jesus says, “*I will keep you from the hour of trial.*” Remember the Lord’s High Priestly Prayer for His disciples in John 17? It’s the only other time in the New Testament that the word “*keep*” is used in this same way is in **John 17:15**, “*I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one.*” Interestingly, the words “*keep them from the evil one*” in John 17:15 are the same words used here in Revelation 3. But in John 17 **keeping** them explicitly does **not** mean taking them out of the world. This is clearly **not** a rapture verse — they are **not** to be taken out of the world, but **kept** from the evil one — they are being protected in the midst of great trials. So I see it as spiritual protection in the midst of the trials that will come.

The phrase “*those who dwell on the earth*” occurs a number of times in Revelation and always refers to the church’s enemies, namely those in Revelation 6 and 11 who murder the martyrs, those in Revelation 13 who worship the beast, and those in Revelation 17 who get drunk on the harlot’s wine. So while the time of trouble at the end of the age will be a time of affliction for the church it will also be a time of judgment for the world.

But it’s not a time of judgment for the church, because after warning the world, Jesus gives this church ...

**v. 11: WISE COUNSEL**

*“I am coming soon. Hold fast what you have, so that no one may seize your crown.”*

They are told to **“Hold fast what you have.”** And apparently they did since this particular church remained faithful to the gospel down through the centuries, even after Islam became the dominant religion in Asia Minor. In fact, throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, the church in Philadelphia has flourished and though we know there are still Christians in some of the other cities, this is the only one of the seven churches which continues on into the present age.

And so not only is Jesus going to preserve them in the midst of trial, He encourages them to hold on to what they have, that is, the gospel which they’ve heard and believed. By holding fast to the gospel, **“no one may seize your crown.”** Again, this is another reference to Isaiah 22, where God takes away the crown from the evil leader and gives it to Eliakim, who has been faithful.

Whatever the hour of trial entails, Christ’s people know that no one can snatch them from the almighty hands of Jesus and His Father, **John 10:28-29**, *“I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of My hand.<sup>29</sup> My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father’s hand.”*

So not only are they to hold fast, but Jesus is holding fast to them. And because of that, He can give them some amazing ...

#### **v. 12-13: PROMISES**

*“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.<sup>13</sup> He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”*

There are a number of interesting points here as we wrap up. First of all, Jesus promises to make the one who conquers **“a pillar in the temple of My God.”** This is a temple which they will never be forced to leave, as **1 Peter 2:4-5** teaches us, that *“As you come to Him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious,<sup>5</sup> you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.”*

In the same way we read in **Ephesians 2:19-22**, *“So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God,<sup>20</sup> built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the cornerstone,<sup>21</sup> in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord.<sup>22</sup> In Him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.”*

This promise makes perfect sense against the backdrop of continual earthquakes which rocked the earthly city of Philadelphia. Instead of being forced to sleep outside and live in fear, God’s people will take up permanent residence in that heavenly temple which even now God is building as the body of Christ. And all those who dwell in this temple dwell in perfect peace and safety.

Second, Jesus promises to write on each of His people the name of My God, as well as the name of the heavenly city. Unlike their own city, which had its name changed **twice** to honor pagan emperors, the heavenly city is named by the eternal God and its name will never be changed.

Furthermore, we have another example of God taking a prophecy given to Israel and applying it to His church. The Biblical Scholar Dr. Sam Storms says, “The irony intensifies when we note that in **Isaiah 60:14** (which we saw back in verse 9) it is the Gentiles who will call the Israelites **“the City of the Lord, the Zion of the Holy One of Israel.”** But now, in Revelation

3:12, the tables are turned: it is **the church** that is described in such glorious terms. There we read that the overcomers before whom these Jews prostrate themselves are given the name of *“the city of My God, the new Jerusalem!”*

So we can see that the perseverance of the saints is in the trustworthy hands of the One making the promises, the One who always keeps His promises.

Now all of that is well and good. But how do we *hold fast what you have*? It’s easier said than done; because we think we have a lot of power and we would much rather depend on ourselves rather than on God. But that doesn’t work ... does it? We have lots of stories in this congregation about the failures that come from trusting in yourself rather than in the Lord Jesus Christ. Let me give you another story along the same lines ...

#### **CONCLUSION: *Invested Share Holders***

Imagine for a minute that you used to work for Lehman Brothers. Now, let’s say that you’ve invested **more than half** of your entire savings and stock portfolio back into Lehman Brothers ... your company. On September 15th, 2008 Lehman Brothers filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy. It was the largest bankruptcy filing in U.S. history entailing over six hundred **billion** dollars in assets. The company did not have a good year. As you may know, Lehman Brothers was a major Wall Street Brokerage firm that crashed and burned and went bankrupt last year when the whole subprime mortgage crisis erupted leading to a worldwide financial meltdown.

If you want to learn more, then I'd direct you to the books; *A Colossal Failure of Common Sense: The Inside Story of the Collapse of Lehman Brothers* by Lawrence McDonald and Patrick Robinson or *The Murder of Lehman Brothers: An Insider's Look at the Global Meltdown* by Joseph Tibman (which is a pen name for a Lehman Brothers insider). Both books are enlightening. According to their Amazon reviews, neither is well-written, or well-edited, having been rushed into print in order to take advantage of the market.

With Lehman Brothers we’re talking about trying to maintain a house of cards and then the hurricane winds of Wall Street just came through and blew everything away and so your stock was sold off for pennies on the dollar, let’s say something like 17 cents a share. You’re so mad because you’ve lost everything that you decide you’re gonna sue (you don’t have any money, **but**, this is an illustration), you’re not sure who you’re gonna sue, but you’re convinced this isn’t fair and you’re going to take on the world and come up with some kind of case. Once you get to court, you discover that the judge hearing the case turns out to have been way more invested in Lehman Brothers than you were and he’s lost far more than you have, even though you’re the guy bringing the case.

Now do you think the judge is going to be able to hear the case without showing even the least amount of bias? Of course not. He might even find some of this guy’s arguments compelling.

Now what’s the point? The point is that every one of you is an invested shareholder this morning. You have bought stock in a worldview that relies on your good works, that you believe will get you into heaven. And then Jesus comes along and destroys your house of cards with something like Category 500 winds and you should quickly realize that your stock in yourself and in your good works isn’t worth anything close to 17 cents a share. However, you can’t look at things objectively because you’re too invested. You’re like the judge who finds these arguments compelling because they put the blame somewhere else.

However, you realize that if the Word of God is correct then you’ll have to change your life — and I’ll have to change my life. If the Word of God is correct then I’m not in charge, I

don't determine my values for myself — God has spelled out what He requires, and I don't judge myself anymore.

This mean that I don't get to do **just** an internal audit anymore — I realize there's now an outside auditor who is doing a comprehensive audit on every word I've ever said and every thought I've ever had and every action I've ever taken. I can assure you that many of us here this morning are in a much worse predicament that anybody who used to work for Lehman brothers. Those folks only have financial problems; I am talking about having an eternal problem.

What you have to do this morning is to dump your stock in yourself, write off your losses, and invest in King Jesus with your life, your talents, your gifts, and your whole being. He has a little bit more pull than Wall Street. He is "*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.*" No one goes up against Jesus and wins.

After all, He's the King. And He's coming back.

And inside and out, He knows your life.

Think about that. You need to pray.

Take a moment to do that, and then I'll close.

*Heavenly Father, once again thank You for revealing Jesus to us. Lord, help us to take seriously what is written here. Teach us how to be people of patient endurance. Teach us how to be people who hold fast to the Gospel. Teach us how to be people who show others the open door that can never be shut, leading to the Kingdom of God. Lord, make us Kingdom people ... in the Name of Your Son, Jesus, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, One God, now and forever. Amen.*

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### **1 Peter 2:4-5**

*"As you come to Him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ."*