

REVELATION—UNVEILING THE END, ACT 1 THE HEAVENLY STAGE

STUDY NINE

Little Strength, Open Door, Awesome God

Revelation 3:7–13

We all are faced with a series of great opportunities brilliantly disguised as impossible situations.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

IMPossible is some people's favorite word. Like the skeptic who denies a friend's exaggerated story about the size of that fish he caught. Like the critic who refuses to believe the underdog team has a shot at winning the championship. Or like the cynic who can't accept that a philanthropist would give away so much money with pure motives. *Impossible!*

Yet the skeptics, critics, and cynics don't own the word. *Impossible* can easily sneak its way into anyone's personal lexicon. Like the parent who just received the cancer diagnosis. Like the business owner whose ledger sits in the red for the second straight quarter. Or like the once-dear loved ones who seem to drift further apart with each passing day. *Impossible . . .*

Sadly, the small human imagination too often fails to look at difficult circumstances from a *divine* perspective. Faithful followers of Jesus know that our God is the God of impossibilities. After all, Jesus Himself pointed out, "What is impossible for people is possible for God" ([Luke 18:27](#)).

The members of the ancient church in Philadelphia recognized the absolute power of God. This small church trusted God to handle what seemed to be an entirely impossible situation revealing their impressive vision for God's perspective and their faith in His perfect plan.



PREPARE YOUR HEART

When you face an impossible situation, what's your first impulse? Do you panic? Run? Hide? Fight? These reactions are natural, but God offers us peace through His perspective, and we can claim that peace through prayer. Offer the following prayer to prepare your heart for what God wants to teach you today:

Father, it sometimes feels difficult to see life from Your perspective. As I study Your Word today, give me the vision and the faith to see the opportunities despite my impossible situations. I pray in Jesus' powerful name. Amen.



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TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

The letters Jesus sent to the seven churches in Asia Minor in [Revelation 2–3](#) addressed some of the Roman Empire’s most important cities. Yet one of these cities stood out from the rest. According to [Revelation 3:7](#), which church did Jesus address *sixth*? How did He describe Himself, and with what description from [1:12–18](#) does His self-description match?

Philadelphia was the youngest and least impressive of the seven cities addressed in the opening act of Revelation. In fact, rulers from the city of Pergamum established it. Just a couple hundred years after its founding, a series of intense earthquakes caused so much destruction that a large portion of the population fled. To learn more about this ancient city, you can read about [Philadelphia](#) in the *Encyclopedia of the Bible*, available for free at biblegateway.com.

How would living as a Christian in a small, insignificant, tumble-down city like Philadelphia have challenged your faith in Christ?

Life didn’t come easily for the believers in Philadelphia. Yet, regardless of their impossible circumstances, they clung to their hope in Christ and remained faithful to Him. So He honored them for their devotion.



Observation: The Church in Philadelphia

Most of the seven churches in [Revelation 2–3](#) had both strengths and weaknesses. In these cases, Jesus commended the strengths and offered concern and correction for the weaknesses. Yet the church in Philadelphia deserved little criticism, so Jesus celebrated them with joyous fanfare. As you observe [3:8–13](#), take note of what Jesus said He “will” do for these faithful believers.¹

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According to [Revelation 3:8a](#), what did Jesus “know” about the church in Philadelphia? What did He do with this knowledge?

In [3:8b](#), Jesus observed that these believers had “little strength.” What did they do despite their weak state? What did they *not* do?

According to [3:9](#), what would happen to “Satan’s synagogue”—to those Jews who mistreated the followers of Jesus in Philadelphia?

By contrast, what did Jesus say He would do because the believers in Philadelphia obeyed His “command to persevere,” according to [3:10](#)?

What additional word of comfort and hope did Jesus offer to this struggling church in [3:11](#)?

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According to [Revelation 3:12–13](#), what did Jesus say would happen to those who “listen to the Spirit and understand what he is saying”? What kind of victory would they obtain?

If a church has a big God, it accomplishes big things regardless of the church’s numerical size. If a church is large and impressive and even influential in the eyes of the world but has a little God, it doesn’t get a whole lot done.

—Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Interpretation: The God of Impossibilities

The church in Philadelphia faced *impossible* difficulties—at least impossible for humans to handle. These believers had little resources and limited influence, and they faced hostility for their beliefs. Yet they trusted God and remained steadfast in their obedience.

What timeless truths does the example of this community demonstrate about persevering amid impossible circumstances?

[Revelation 3:10](#) plays an important role in clarifying the message of this letter. Read this verse in a more word-for-word translation (like the New American Standard Bible), and notice the parallel language. Because the believers in Philadelphia “kept” Jesus’ word, He promised to “keep” them from the hour of testing.

The Greek term Jesus used in this verse is [tereo](#), and it has an elastic meaning. Look it up in the Greek lexicon, available for free at [billmounce.org](#), and consider the range of possible translations. Based on the context of this verse, what unique sense does each use of “keep” have? Write your own translation in the spaces below.

You have “kept” the word: _____

I also will “keep” you: _____

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In light of this examination, what does this verse reveal about rewards for believers who remain faithful to Christ despite their difficult circumstances? Be sure to consider the contrast between [Revelation 3:9](#) and [3:10](#).

We who much prefer our plan to God's surprises often are too short-sighted to value the changes He has in mind for us, which will lead us inevitably to real contentment. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Correlation: The Key of David

In Jesus' introduction to His letter to the church in Philadelphia, He described Himself as the One who possesses “the key of David” ([Revelation 3:7](#)). This language alludes to a prophecy from [Isaiah 22](#), in which God confronted a corrupt royal administrator named Shebna. According to [22:16–18](#), how did Shebna misuse his position of influence? How would God judge his actions?

Because of Shebna's wickedness, God would replace him with someone who better reflected the heart of God. According to [22:20](#), who would succeed Sheba as the royal administrator? According to [22:22](#), what kind of unique authority would he have?

Because Eliakim was a righteous person, God gave him the key of David—human authority to carry out royal affairs on behalf of the people of Israel. Centuries later, another would hold this same key—though He would possess eternal, divine authority.

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What unique authority did the key of David give Jesus? In other words, what door does He open and not close? Compare [Revelation 1:18](#) and [3:7–8](#). For some guidance answering this question, feel free to use your Bible-study tools, like Pastor Chuck’s commentary, *Insights on Revelation*, or *Constable’s Notes* which is available for free at netbible.org.²

Only Jesus holds the keys of death and life. Anyone who wants to walk through the door of everlasting life *must* go through Him. When you walk through this door, nothing will close it and lock it again—no matter how impossible your situation may seem.



Application: Opportunities, Vision, and Faith

The believers in Philadelphia made up a small community with limited resources. Yet they maintained fidelity and boldness for the gospel of Jesus. In other words, this church had *enormous opportunities* that allowed God to work in and through it.

Pastor Chuck believes everyone should learn to see their impossible situations as great opportunities in which God can do great things. He refers to these circumstances as “insurmountable opportunities,” about which he shares two application points.

First, *insurmountable opportunities turn our attention back to God, which ignites vision*. As you reflect on the most impossible moments in your life, God might have felt absent. As you look back now, how can you see that His strong, guiding hand carried you through the difficulty? How can remembering His past faithfulness give you eyes to see Him work in the present?

Second, *insurmountable opportunities force us to trust completely in God, which prompts faith*. You might be facing an impossible situation right now. What, from a human perspective, makes it feel impossible? What practical steps can you take to adopt a divine perspective and to trust God with the outcome of your circumstances?

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As you look at the mountain before you, it may seem unscalable. Yet God has laid out a path for you. Trust Him to lead you over the rocky terrain—step-by-step, opportunity by opportunity. When you stand at the summit, you will look back in awe as you see how God made possible the impossible.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, I know I cannot conquer my impossible circumstances on my own. So help me to see them as opportunities to trust You and to grow. You never promised this life would be easy, but You do offer hope that everything will be made right one day. Help me never to forget that—especially when I feel weak, small, and insignificant. In Jesus' great name I pray. Amen.

ENDNOTES

1. To learn more about Pastor Chuck Swindoll's *Searching the Scriptures* Bible-study method, go to the web page, "[How to Study the Bible for Yourself](#)."
2. Charles R. Swindoll, *Insights on Revelation*, Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2014).

For the 2024 broadcasts, this *Searching the Scriptures* study was developed by Brad Smith, writer and content strategist, *Searching the Scriptures* Ministries, based upon the original outlines, charts, and transcripts of Charles R. Swindoll's messages. Copyright © 2003, 2024 by Charles R. Swindoll, Inc. All rights are reserved worldwide. Duplication of copyrighted material for commercial use is strictly prohibited.

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