

### Hold On To What You Have

Listen very carefully to these words that Jesus spoke concerning the signs of his coming: **“You will hear of wars and rumors of wars. There will be great earthquakes, famines, and pestilences in various places, and fearful events and great signs from heaven. You will be hated by all nations because of me. At that time many will turn away from the faith. Because of the increase of wickedness the love of most will grow cold”** (Matthew 24:6, 7, 9, 10, 12; Luke 21:11). Did you listen carefully to that? Do you doubt that Jesus is coming soon? I don’t think any humble, faithful Christian does. The signs Jesus spoke of in Matthew and Luke are loud and clear today.

But until Jesus does return, what are we supposed to do? Honestly, what are we supposed to do? I ask the question because for the humble, faithful Christian these days aren’t easy. It isn’t easy to stay humble or faithful when you’re being pushed, pressured, and treated like pariah for your faith in Christ. So what are we supposed to do? Well, listen to Revelation 3:11: (Jesus says) **“I am coming soon. Hold on to what you have, so that no one will take your crown.”**

There a lot of things Jesus wants us to do during these difficult days – like be ready, be attentive, be prepared, serve others, share the good news of salvation – but above all, during these days, Jesus says that **“we are to hold on to what we have.”** The **“what we have”** is explained in Revelation 3:8. It is an **“open door”** to all the treasures of God’s kingdom – to his love, to his forgiveness, to eternal life in heaven. And do not underestimate what a treasure these things are. My fear is that we hear of God’s love, forgiveness, and eternal life in heaven so often that we at times treat them as trinkets rather than treasure, and as a result, we do not hold on to them for dear life and risk the danger of letting them slip through our hands. And for what? For other things that we have and hold on to?

Jesus said that **“where your treasure is, there your heart will be also”** (Matthew 6:21). So where has your heart been? If you have been holding on to earthly things too tightly, do you realize that you have likely fallen **“into a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction”** (1 Timothy 6:9)? Or if you have been holding on to a grudge, do you understand that **“if you do not forgive people their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins”** (Matthew 6:15)? Or if you have been holding on to worldly wisdom and human strength, don’t you see that **“God chose the foolish things of the world (namely the cross of Jesus) to shame the wise; and God chose the weak things of the world (again, the cross of Jesus) to shame the strong”** (1 Corinthians 1:27)?

God forgive us for holding on to things in our heart that have become more important and precious to us than the treasures of God’s love, forgiveness, and eternal life in heaven. And may we never take for granted that we have an “open door” to those treasures.

That’s hard to imagine, isn’t it, that we have an open door to all the treasures of God’s kingdom? Doesn’t it feel more often like his door should be closed to us?

- If God's door had a do not disturb sign on it, wouldn't we understand, because why would he want anything to do with us? Isn't that how our sins make us feel?
- And if God had a cover charge at his door or an entry fee, wouldn't we just turn right around, because we know that there's no way we have enough to get in? Isn't that how our debt to God makes us feel?
- And if God had a dress code to get in his door, wouldn't we figure we have no shot of getting in, because we know we are all lowly beggars? Isn't that how guilt and shame make us feel?

You realize, don't you, that there is no way that God's door is open to us unless someone opens it for us.

There are many things that happened upon Jesus' death. But do you remember this one? Matthew 27: **"And when Jesus had cried out again in a loud voice, he gave up his spirit. At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom"** (50, 51). That curtain in the temple acted as a veil between heaven and earth. It stood between the holy God and sinful human beings. It, in essence, was a closed door because our sin stood in the way. But when Jesus died in our place on the cross, and suffered our punishment and paid the price for our sins, he removed the barrier of sin that stood between us and God and opened up free access to God and all the treasures of his kingdom.

- Because of Jesus, there is no "do not disturb" on the door to heaven. There's only God's gracious invitation: **"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened. Come to the feast at my table."**
- Because of Jesus, the cover charge or entry fee has been paid. Jesus clearly cried out from the cross, **"It is finished,"** which literally means **"paid in full."**
- And because of Jesus, you have the necessary clothes to get into heaven. **"God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God"** (2 Corinthians 5:21).

This message of the open door was at the heart of the Reformation, and that is why we are Lutherans. Martin Luther thought that he had to do something in order for God to open his door to him, but the harder he tried, the tighter shut the door seemed. Nothing he did was good enough. He couldn't confess enough sins. He couldn't pray enough prayers. He couldn't do enough good deeds. He couldn't punish himself enough. The harder he tried, the more he only felt God's disappointment and anger. But then he came upon this Bible passage: **"I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes...For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: 'The just shall live by faith'"** (Romans 1:16, 17) and this is what Martin Luther wrote about this Bible passage:

***"I yearned to learn what 'the just shall live by faith' meant. Night and day I pondered it till I grasped that the justice of God is that righteousness by which grace and sheer mercy God***

*justifies us through faith. Thereupon I felt myself to be reborn and to have gone through open doors into paradise. This passage of Paul became a gate to heaven.*

*“If you have a true faith that Christ is your Savior, then at once you have a gracious God, for faith leads you in and opens up God’s heart and will, that you should see pure grace and overflowing love. This is to behold God in faith that you should look upon his fatherly, friendly heart, in which there is no anger nor ungraciousness. He who sees God as angry does not see him rightly but looks only on a curtain, as if a dark cloud had been drawn across his face.”*

Luther thought he had to justify himself before God for God to open his door to him, but he learned that according to the gospel, it is God who has justified him through faith in Jesus Christ. This is why Jesus said: **“I am the door; whoever enters me will be saved”** (John 10:9).

Why, more than any other reason, do you feel like God’s door is closed to you? It’s because you feel he is angry with you and wants nothing to do with you. Dear friends, that couldn’t be more contrary to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. He gave you his one and only Son out of love. He sacrificed him on the cross for the forgiveness of sins. He raised him from the dead to assure you the victory of life. The door couldn’t be any more open than it is through Jesus. All of God’s is all of yours. Don’t let anyone or anything take that away from you. Hold on to what you have. Hold on to it for dear life. Amen.