

Reformation in the End Times

Reformation Day 2016

By Pastor Cory Griess

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Bible Text: Revelation 3:7-13
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Covenant Of Grace Protestant Reformed

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There are Bibles in the pews where you're sitting if you'd like to read along. Revelation 3, beginning at verse 7 and I'll read through verse 13. The letter to the church at Philadelphia. Revelation 3:7. This is God's holy inspired word.

7 And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write; These things saith he that is holy, he that is true, he that hath the key of David, he that openeth, and no man shutteth; and shutteth, and no man openeth; 8 I know thy works: behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it: for thou hast a little strength, and hast kept my word, and hast not denied my name. 9 Behold, I will make them of the synagogue of Satan, which say they are Jews, and are not, but do lie; behold, I will make them to come and worship before thy feet, and to know that I have loved thee. 10 Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth. 11 Behold, I come quickly: hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown. 12 Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out: and I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, which is new Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from my God: and I will write upon him my new name. 13 He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.

Our speaker tonight is Pastor Cory Griess from the Calvary Protestant Reformed Church in a little town in northwest Iowa called Hull that you've probably never heard of. It's famous because it's the home of Pizza Ranch, but you've probably never heard of Pizza Ranch either. That's a midwest Pizza chain. We're delighted to have Rev. Griess here this evening. Rev. Griess originally hails from Loveland, Colorado. He graduated from the seminary of the Protestant Reformed Churches in 2009 and has served at Calvary Church since then. He's married and together Rev. Griess and his wife have five children. Tonight he's going to speak on the important subject "Reformation in the End Times," an important subject because it brings together two very important subjects: reformation, as well as the end times and I'll let him say more about his subject. There are outlines for the

speech tonight and I have some on the table here I'll hand out to you in a minute while Rev. Griess is preparing to speak.

Also, there are in the pew in front of you, in the back of the pew in front of you, cards as well as ink pens and if while we're speaking Rev. Griess says something that raises a question in your mind, we're going to have a question and answer period at the end and you can write your questions on those cards and we'll collect those at the end for Rev. Griess to answer.

After the speech, there will be a time of refreshments and coffee downstairs and it's 7:16 and I'd almost rather wait until 7:30 to start because somebody told me that maybe on the radio I said 7:30. I'm not sure so anyway, I'll ask Rev. Griess now to come forward and I'll hand out these outlines for anyone.

I think Rev. Klein, if you do want to wait until 7:30, you can just come back up here. I'm pretty sure you could fill ten minutes pretty easily without really having anything prepared.

Thank you to the congregation for the invitation to speak tonight. I appreciate it. Thanks too for the topic that you gave to me, an interesting topic, a striking topic, perhaps a bit of a unique different topic for a Reformation Day lecture. We are living in the last days, in one sense we always have been since the ascension of the Lord Jesus Christ and the Bible speaks of the time from his ascension to the end as the last days. It's the last thing on God's timeline of redemption yet it is increasingly apparent that there are many of the signs that Scripture speaks of of the end times that seem to be coming to pass in our day and it makes us think and wonder if we're living close to the end of the end times. With that in mind, the question comes up: what does the church do in these last times? That's something of my topic tonight.

Ever since the sexual revolution of the 60s and the 70s, there has been a climate change and the climate change that I speak of is not the change in the temperature of the globe that people discuss and argue about today, but rather there has been a change in the religious climate in this country and really in all of western civilization. There has been in the church world an increasing compromise with the secularism of the age reminiscent of the times of Israel and the compromises of Israel with the world around them, increasingly there are compromises in the church world with the world around us: Jesus and God talk but mixed with the worldliness of the age. Not all in the church, of course, but this increases.

In the world, there is an increasing brashness, unashamed antipathy towards the things of God, even the basic truths of God's holy word in western civilization and in this land in particular. In one sense always there has been some antipathy to the things of God, of course, and in one sense always there has been compromise with the world, but there has been since I say the 60s and 70s and even increasingly in the last ten years, a brashness and boldness in these things; an unashamed nature of this and the openness of expressing

with respect to these compromises in the church and the antipathy of the world towards the things of God. It's a day and age that really matches in many ways what the Bible speaks of as the times of the day of antichrist. 2 Timothy 3:2-4, "For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, Without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, Traitors, heady, highminded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God." I think Rev. Klein has described that last one as pleasure madness a number of times.

The entire world is carried along in a movement that could only be fueled by the rise of the internet, love of openness, love for lust of the flesh, that one stands aghast with Jeremiah in Jeremiah 6, "Were they ashamed when they had committed abomination? nay, they were not at all ashamed, neither could they blush." It's a day and age that reminds one even of the description of antichrist himself in Daniel 7:25, "And he shall speak," that is, the antichrist, "shall speak great words against the most High, and shall wear out the saints of the most High, and think to change times and laws." Fairly recent decisions in Europe and in this country, setting homosexual unions on a par with the union of a husband and a wife, something that has not been done in the history of mankind is reminiscent of that description in Daniel 7, the changing of God's holy even naturally revealed laws.

The voices, and there have been many voices among the faithful who have called the faithful remnant in the west therefore to prepare for difficult times, are correct. Though many of God's people have faced persecution for many years in other lands, we have lived in relative ease as God's people in the west. In one sense, of course, we've suffered persecution as the Bible says all that live godly will suffer persecution, but we have not yet resisted unto blood. There has not been that kind of imprisonment or bloodshed for the sake of the stand for the truths of Jesus Christ in this land. In fact, the time of peace for the church that has been in this land, as far as I can tell, has been unprecedented in the history of the church. Unless something very opposite happens in God's providence, it seems that that may change in the future. If it does, whether or not this is the final rise of antichrist or simply another shadow of him, one dare not say completely with certainty one way or the other, but regardless the climate is changing and we have taken notice and have called the church to prepare.

One good thing about it is that it allows the church to see herself in the mirror of the church historically, a church that historically has more often than not been the history of a church under duress, under the sword. Certainly, the changing climate has allowed the church to see herself better in the experience of the Reformation church, and maybe even more than that, to allow the church to see herself especially in the experience of the apostolic church in the New Testament Scriptures and therefore observing the Reformation church and observing the apostolic church allows us to understand where we are, what it's like to be where we are and to prepare therefore for what may be coming, for even things such as the loss of rights, the loss of freedom, the loss of possessions, even life perhaps for the name of Jesus Christ.

But observing the New Testament church and observing the Reformation church prepares us for something else as well, it prepares us for the possibility of an open door even under such times. That isn't always thought of and that isn't always talked about. What shall we do in the times that lie before us now in this land, new times for us in this country that we have not experienced before? Shall we simply hunker down and sort of keep to ourselves and hide in a corner? As we're calling, shift now from development of God's truth and promotion of the truth to sheer survival of the storm? Do we conclude that God's purposes with his church are really coming to an end now and we should all abandon the church of Jesus Christ? Or is there the possibility that God gives to his church even in the midst of what seem to be coming difficult times, something of an open door? And is it possible that we must be prepared to be used of God even as we are prepared to suffer for him?

I give as the title of my speech "An Open Door?" with a question mark behind it. That's important. An open door with a question mark behind it and with this as the subtitle: the possibility of reformation in the last days. Starting with the church in Revelation 3, the church of Philadelphia, as Christ from his ascended throne in glory speaks to his church through these seven letters to the churches there, he speaks to Philadelphia as a church that was being persecuted. The little church in Philadelphia was persecuted mainly by the Jewish population, a fairly sizable Jewish population in the city of Philadelphia. The Lord calls that Jewish population a synagogue of Satan in Revelation 3:9, "Behold, I will make them of the synagogue of Satan, which say they are Jews, and are not, but do lie." Called the synagogue of Satan by the Lord Christ because they are accusing the believers. Satan means accuser, that's the meaning of that word. Satan is called the accuser because always he accuses the brethren, he persecutes the brethren by accusation, and here the Lord calls this synagogue, a synagogue of Satan, because Satan is using this Jewish synagogue to persecute the believers by means of accusations against them, hence a synagogue of the accuser, of Satan.

They were accusing the believers in Philadelphia in two ways. First of all, they had been accusing them of apostates, of being people who were not part of the kingdom of God at the time when they excommunicated these believers out of that Jewish synagogue precisely because of their belief in Christ as the Messiah. It helps to understand that when we remember the way that mission work was done in the apostolic church and how this little church in Philadelphia was formed. When the Apostle Paul and others went out into Asia Minor and other places to do missions, they went first into the Jewish synagogue in a city if that city had a Jewish synagogue. And if there was fruit upon their preaching in that synagogue to the point where a good amount of people in that synagogue were committed to the Lord Christ, then the attempt was made to really roll that synagogue over into a Christian church. But if it became clear under the work of the apostles that the majority were hardened against the testimony of Christ or that the leaders in authority of that synagogue were hardened against Christ, then one of two things would happen: either the believers would leave, separate and start their own Christian congregation, or they would be excommunicated by the Jewish synagogue and be forced to start their own congregation and the early church fathers testify that more often than not, they were excommunicated. In fact, we still have remaining today a part, at least, of one of the very

curses that the Jews placed upon the believers when they excommunicated them out of the synagogue. It reads like this, "For the apostates, may there be no hope unless they return to the Torah," to the law, "for the nozerim," that's the Nazarene; they called Christians sometimes Nazarenes, followers of Jesus of Nazareth, "for the nozerim and the minim," that means heretics. "May they perish immediately." And then we learn from other sources too that they prayed three times a day that God would rain curses down upon those who were part of the synagogue but who had become believers in Christ. This is the accusation, this is why they're a synagogue of Satan. They are accusing them of being apostates outside the kingdom of God when they are, in fact, the kingdom of God. They shut the door of the synagogue upon them and told them, "You have no part in the things of God."

Their accusations didn't stop there as we learn from the letter to the church in Smyrna. The Jews would often then take the believers to the civil authorities too and accuse them before the local Roman authorities. At this time, most Roman local authorities required that people in their jurisdiction worship Caesar and the Christians would not say, "Caesar is Lord," because Jesus is Lord and the Jews knew that and they would take them before the local authorities and say, "Tell them to say, 'Caesar is Lord.' They won't." And when they wouldn't, the civil authority would fine them or sometimes even imprison them, take away their job, something like that. This is the way local persecution worked at the time of the apostolic church and this is how the little church in Philadelphia was persecuted, these kind of accusations.

All that this little church had endured but now the Lord warns this little church here that even a greater persecution is yet coming. In verse 10, Revelation 3:10 speaks of "the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth," a reference not to the great persecution at the end, but a reference to one of the great persecutions of the empire that occurred shortly after this time. Was it perhaps the persecution under the Emperor Domitian that would come only a few years after this where the Emperor Domitian so filled with hostility to Christians, actually murdered his entire family when he suspected that a few of them were coming under the influence of Christianity? Or was it the persecution of the Emperor Decius a little bit later, 250 AD, the first organized empire-wide persecution of the Christian church? Every Christian was required to make a sacrifice to the Roman emperor in the presence of a Roman official or suffer imprisonment, torture or death. Was it perhaps the persecution under Diocletian, that emperor in 303 called the great persecution of the early church where churches were burned, Christians were rounded up, books were burned, God's people imprisoned, tortured, killed? These are the persecutions that led the early church to believe that the end was near and persecutions that led the early church father, Justin Martyr, to write that quote, "He whom Daniel foretells would have dominion for a time, times and half a time is already at the door."

That persecution, greater persecution is coming, the Lord warns that little church but it is promised to her in verse 10 that he would keep this little church, preserve her and keep her faithful even under these times. The little church in Philadelphia had been faithful under persecution already and Christ promises she would remain faithful even under

greater persecution coming. He speaks of two ways that the church had been faithful and would continue to be faithful, two "P's." First of all, she had been faithful to preserve truth. Verse 8, for thou "hast kept my word." She preserved God's truth, did not compromise it under this pressure. She did not fall to the temptation to compromise doctrinal fidelity in attempt to escape some of this pressure or to grow bigger, to gain more recognition in the world around her. She held to the truths of God's word without fear or favor. Then secondly in verse 8, she had also published the truths of God's word to those around her. Verse 8, thou "hast kept my word, and hast not denied my name." That is, "Publicly, thou hast not denied my name. You didn't stop proclaiming my name publicly to those around you." She published the truths of God's word. She didn't fall to the other temptation to remain doctrinally faithful but then huddle in a corner. She promoted Christ publicly with love and fervor. She was faithful both to preserve and to publish.

And the great blessing that Christ says is for her, reserved for this little church, in verse 8, is that he will use her for the further gathering of his church and the reformation of his church in her time, and promises not that she would be able to exact revenge on her enemies, and the promise is not even merely that she would survive, but the promise is that Christ would use her even under this pressure, under this persecution and give to her an open door. Verse 8, "behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it." That is, she would have opportunities to preach and to speak and to write, publish the truths of God's word with fruit upon her labors. That's what an open door is in the Bible. Acts 14:27, "And when they were come, and had gathered the church together, they rehearsed all that God had done with them, and how he had opened the door of faith unto the Gentiles." 1 Corinthians 16:8-9, "But I will tarry at Ephesus until Pentecost. For a great door and effectual is opened unto me." The Lord Jesus Christ, the King of the church, the one who in the beginning of his letter to Philadelphia is the one who holds the key of David, that is, the key to the kingdom of God, who opens that door to that kingdom and no man shuts and who shuts and no man opens, Christ's promise is that, "Even under this greater pressure and persecution, I will give to you an open door. Where you have preserved my truth, you will be able to publish it in new ways, proclaim it, witness to it and I will give you fruit upon your labor."

Strikingly he promises that some of that fruit will be that some of the very Jews who had persecuted these believers in that synagogue will now come and worship Jehovah God with them and join them when they had before cast them out of their synagogue. Verse 9, "Behold, I will make them of the synagogue of Satan, which say they are Jews, and are not, but do lie; behold, I will make them to come and worship before thy feet, and to know that I have loved thee." That's not, "I'm going to make them come and worship you before your feet," but, "I'm going to make them come and worship me before your feet so that they see that they were wrong, that I loved you. You are part of the kingdom. You weren't outside the kingdom, that they needed to come in. I'll bring some of your persecutors to join with you under your witness, even under this tumultuous time."

Whether the early church father Tertullian, who was converted in the second century, had any knowledge of this little church in Philadelphia or not, what happened to that early

father, Christ promises will happen to some, they will be brought into this little church. Tertullian, the early church father, was a Roman who was a despiser of Christianity. When he saw the Christian martyrs dying for their faith and he investigated under that in God's providence the claims of the Lord Jesus Christ and was himself converted at the witness of those dying martyrs, the same Tertullian later declared famously, "The blood of the martyrs is seed." The early church was persecuted. The early church believed that the end was near and they remained faithful to their calling to preserve and to publish and the King of the church gave them an open door even under those tumultuous times.

In 1521, that's four years after Luther nailed the 95 theses to the door of Wittenberg's church, 1521, Charles V, a Roman Catholic Emperor of Spain, issued decrees for the extermination of what he called the Lutheran heresy and thereby officially beginning the Roman Catholic persecution of Protestants, persecution that was intense and zealous. Two years after that, 1523, Heinrich Voes and Johann Esch, two Dutchman, were captured by the Spanish Inquisition in the city of Antwerp in the Netherlands and were burned at the stake for their confession of the truth of justification by grace alone through faith alone, the first burnings at the stake of the Roman Catholic Church in the Protestant persecution, a matter that so troubled Martin Luther that he wrote a moving poem about these two men and about how God would use their witness to travel the world over for the cause of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. That same Spanish Inquisition that burned those two men at the stake, went on to be responsible for somewhere around 120,000 Protestant deaths during its 300 some years of existence through the Reformation period.

That's just the Spanish Inquisition. The Roman Catholic Church, the entire Roman Catholic Church from 1150 to 1560 killed, murdered, martyred, some 250,000 Reformation Dutch alone. In addition to that, the Roman Catholic Church killed 10,000 French Reformed in one day and went on to kill another 500,000 French Reformed Huguenots in the French Reformed Huguenot Persecution. Half a million people, Reformed people, just in France.

In all, a number of scholars have estimated that somewhere around 15 million Protestants were killed by the Roman Catholic Church in both its civil arm estate leaders and its religious arm during the entirety of the Reformation period. Almost endless stories of monks and priests and others torturing people on the rack, burning at the stake, for refusal to submit to Roman doctrines like transubstantiation. The Roman Catholic Church became a great type of the antichristian kingdom as it wore out the saints with its persecution. It's no wonder then that the Reformers taught that the office of the antichrist, office of the papacy rather, was the antichrist. And it's not wonder that some of them at least, believed that the time of the Reformation was very near the end of the world.

John Calvin was more cautious to write and speak about that, maybe you'd say he's more circumspect about it. Especially it was Martin Luther who believed that the end of the world was very close, at the time of the Reformation spoke and wrote publicly about that conviction. Luther saw the advancement of the Muslim Turks in his day and age. They had doubled the size of the Ottoman Empire just before he nailed his 95 these and were always knocking on the door of Christian Europe throughout the entire Reformation

period. He saw that as a sign of the end. At the same time, he saw that the true Gospel of justification by grace alone was going forth to the ends of the know world through his pen and voice and that of other Reformers too, and he saw that also as a sign of the end. Add to that, he saw the power of the false church of Rome in its persecution of God's people as I just outlined a moment ago. And he saw the Roman Catholic Church really matching that description of Daniel 7 of the antichrist changing times and laws.

It's striking that Luther focused on the fact that the Roman Catholic Church had overthrown the laws of marriage by requiring celibacy for its priests, and he saw that as an overthrow of the law of God, the naturally revealed law of God, as changing times and laws, and that was a great sign that the end was near. In 1520, Luther said in a public speech this, "I verily believe that the judgment day is at the door though men are thinking least about it." And in 1544, shortly before he died, he wrote to a friend that he really didn't think he had anymore work left to do, he had nothing left to say or write because he believed that Christ would come very shortly. He added there this, "It appears to me as if the world itself were approaching its end and as the Psalmist says, is waxing old so there is nothing to hope for except the day of our great God." A little bit later in his life he said, couldn't possibly imagine that the world would last beyond 1547. Luther never spoke definitively about that, of course. He resisted the temptation to set forth a day or an hour of the coming of Jesus Christ, but he believed that the end was close and many of the Reformers did too.

Nonetheless, even under such times with such pressure and such difficulty, Luther, Calvin and the other Reformers continued faithful in their calling for the preservation and the promotion of the truth of God's word. Even as persecution rained down upon them, even as the beast of Rome rose up before their very eyes, they continued faithful. Remember that when Luther translated the Bible into German, the vernacular of the people for the first time, he did that in a room under threat, wondering if someone would come in sometime and strike him through. Think about all the work that they did under so much pressure, how many commentaries were written expounding the Scriptures, how many sermons were preached every day even through the Reformation period, preserving and publishing the truth of God's word; how many books were written, how many colloquies and conferences; how many ministers were trained and sent; how the truth was developed more and more fully during this time, all under this pressure and threat. With a zeal for the Lord, they preserved and they published under such times as the conscious fulfillment of the calling of the King of the church over them.

It's striking to see in their own words and to see how in their own mind they had this sense, this burden, that even under such times it was their calling that they must labor day in and day out to preserve and to publish the truths of God's word. You can get that probably from another number of their writings but I think it's most explicit and beautiful for my purposes at least tonight, from a sermon that Calvin preached on 1 Timothy 2:3-5. 1 Timothy 2:3-5 says this, "For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour; Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus." In that sermon, Calvin explains the will of God to save all men there, "You will have all

men to be saved," not as a frustrated desire of God to save every man head-for-head, but he explained it in light of the context there as the Spirit intended as God desired to save all kinds of men, all different classes of men. In the sermon he applies that this way, "The will of God's command is that we not distinguish classes that we think are more or less worthy when we bring the Gospel. God will save men from poor, rich, kings, paupers."

After explaining that's what the text means, Calvin then goes on to say this in his sermon, "Therefore we may be so much the more assured that God taketh and holdeth us for his children if we endeavor to bring those to him who are afar off. Let us comfort ourselves and take courage in this our calling." You see his understanding of the calling, the burden in this day even under persecution. "Let us take courage in this our calling. Although there be at this day a great forlornness, though we seem to be miserable creatures, utterly cast away and condemned, yet we must labor as much as possible to draw those to salvation who seem to be afar off. And above all things, let us pray to God for them, waiting patiently until it pleases him to show his good will toward them as he has shown it to us. Under the persecution of Rome, we are miserable creatures." This burden was there on the Reformers to be called to preserve and to publish, to spread forth the truth of God's word. Calvin knew that God had his elect out there and through this means he would make it effective.

Then a little bit later in that same sermon, he makes it explicit what that calling was to preserve and to publish which is convenient for my outline and now you know why I picked that sermon. I quote, "Seeing then that God has given us such a treasure and so inestimable a thing as his word, we must employ ourselves as much as we can and that it may be kept safe and sound and not perish." That is the calling to preserve. "And let every man be sure to lock it up securely in his own heart. But it is not enough to have an eye to his own salvation but the knowledge of God must shine generally throughout the whole world." That's the calling to publish the truth of God's word and so they did.

They labored and under difficult times in the way of their faithfulness, the great King of the church who still held the key of David, who still opens and no man shuts and no man opens, gave to them an open door. Often through great controversy, the truth was developed and preserved. The church was reformed in many places back according to the doctrines of Scripture but not compromised but preserved in truth. Even as their books were being burned, they continued to publish and off of Gutenberg's press, their books rolled, rolled out to the public, preserving, publishing the truth of God's holy word.

The work that was begun by the early Reformers continued in the next generation. Councils, synods met for the preservation and publication of the truth, sometimes even under threat and duration. Certain cities throughout the Reformation period, Geneva chief among them, became centers where God's truth was preserved and published and men could come to this little haven of freedom to study to be pastors and to go back out into all of Europe and all the world preaching the Reformation Gospel so that while in France in 1555 there were only five underground Reformed churches, France was Roman Catholic, five underground Reformed churches, 1555, seven years later, 1562, there were more than 2,150 underground Reformed churches in France, all fed by ministers coming

out of Calvin's Geneva and going into that country to preach the truth of God's word. But even though it was a death sentence to go from Geneva to France, they went and ministered and the church grew there, even under the pressure of persecution.

Besides France, Reformed missionaries were sent to Italy, the Netherlands, Hungary, Poland, what is now the states of Germany. In fact, from Geneva Calvin even sent missionaries to Brazil. And remember, the people who are coming into these churches now under the Reformation Gospel were all Roman Catholic before. This is Reformation of the church back to the truths of God's word in every way: in worship, in doctrine, in life, in church government. They were unashamed of the truths of God's word and God gave them an open door. The Reformers themselves, remember, were Roman Catholic originally. They were brought to God's truth. It means that God gave them then, that some of their enemies would come and worship before their feet and gave them under such times of apostasy and persecution and threat a great open door and used them as they were faithful to preserve and to publish.

It's very striking that many of the same things that Luther pointed to made him believe the end times were there are a lot of the same things that we think of today that makes us think that the end times are near. There is persecution of the church rising throughout the world and the threat of that increasing in this country. There is the growth of the false church, not only Rome but liberal Protestantism. There is the overthrow of God's laws, including the laws of marriage. As Luther saw then, now with homosexual marriage being legalized. There is still the threat of the Turk and Muslims knocking on the door of Europe and North America.

And yet at the same time, things are different now than they were then. The Gospel has really almost gone to the ends of the earth, an earth that the Reformers didn't know is nearly as big as we know it is now. Especially through the cause of missions, but also the internet, the Gospel is going to almost the entire earth. There is an advance in evil, explicit, brash, evil in our days that was beyond even anything that Luther or the Reformers could have ever imagined. There is a unity in that evil throughout the globe.

There are many things that have to happen yet, many signs of the times that have to occur yet. There is no doubt that there are developments toward that antichristian kingdom and the threat of the persecution even that cannot be denied. I don't know, I'm not a prophet, I don't know what's going to happen in the next 50 years in this country in any detail, of course, but as I said in the introduction, unless something opposite happens, surely our way will be made more narrow in this country than it is. Surely there will continue to be falling away, apostasy from the faith, as nominal Christianity falls even further to secularism. Surely, there will continue to be progress toward the coming of the antichrist and his kingdom.

So now I go back to the question in the introduction: what shall we do? What shall we do? We shall do what the church has always done, we shall continue to preserve and we shall continue to publish even under pressure and difficult times if they come. There was a Reformed theologian in Germany at the time just before WWII. One day his seminary

students came running into his study with exasperation and fear, "Hitler has just declared himself Dictator of all of Germany. Professor, what shall we do?" And the theologian replied, "We're going to do the same thing we did yesterday, we're going to do theology." That's what we must do. Faithful, God-honoring, biblical, confessional churches must say with Calvin, "Let us comfort ourselves, let us take courage in this our calling. Although there by forlornness, though we be miserable creatures even, cast away possibly and condemned, yet we must labor to draw men to salvation, to keep the truths of God's word safe and to cause them to shine throughout the world." We must work to preserve the truths in the midst of our generation, the children and grandchildren after us. We must work yet for church reformation. We must work to give a witness to all around with a burning passion for the Gospel applied to the souls of men.

There are so many in this day and age, not all of course, but so many who are trying to compromise, who want to compromise, want to be as much like the world as possible in order, they say, to be able to build bridges and win people to Christ, but the great calling, people of God, is really the precise opposite. The great calling is the spiritual difference, the spiritual antithetical life that sings with the Psalms, "For Christ the King, forsake the world spiritually in every former friend." Who left can show people a different way anymore? A better way? The right way and the pure way in accord with God's word? Stable family life and marriages? Who can live before the world the life that James calls the church to live, a life unspotted by that world? This is vital.

This is what's needed in this day and age and as we go forward, stepping into the world of a faithful Reformed church must be stepping into a radically different world where this warmth and a real kind of deep love, not just platitudes, but a world of a different vision and different principle of life and a different goal. They don't need to step into a place that's a more therapeutic version of their own world. The contrast is part of the hope. And the open door in Revelation 2 and 3 is not given to the apostatizing and there were apostatizing churches, it's given to the little church in Philadelphia who preserved and who published. This we must do. We must publish it in writing and speech, in very deed, with confidence witness, confident in God's word and the truths that it proclaims yet in humility, humility and love.

It's striking what the Apostle Paul says in 2 Timothy 4:3-5, "For the time will come," speaking of the last days, "when they will not endure sound doctrine," that's our days, isn't it? "But after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables." But the Apostle Paul still charges Timothy that even when those days come, "watch thou in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry." With boldness, confidence, yet not with arrogance, we must yet work with holy zeal for the glory of God's name; with sorrow at the broken lives of those under the bondage of the evil one; with wisdom; with the understanding that the world that we live in is more like Revelation 3 and the empire of those days than it is like Europe in 1517. We must speak forth God's word to a hopeless age, preserve and publish.

And who can tell, people of God, who can tell whether or not God will give the faithful, even under these times and the times that are coming, something of an open door. It may be just a crack, I don't know. Perhaps an open door that the faithful have not had for quite some time. I am an amillennialist. This is a church that is amillennialist and we know from God's word that things tend toward decay, ultimately falling away. This speech is not a post-millennial plea to usher in the thousand year reign of Christ's victory on earth for the church. Things are slouching into the kingdom of antichrist but that does not mean that the Lord will not give open doors to faithful churches even in the process. It doesn't mean that he won't purify his church on earth through the process. Doesn't he always do that under such times? There will be something of an open door whether a crack or greater, there is an open door under these types of times. Maybe even for the churches that this church is a part of, Protestant Reformed churches, an open door like she has not had before.

In times of ease and plenty, people will dance and rock and play even in church but what are they going to do and where are they going to go when tumultuous times come? If they are God's people and may there be some there, where are they going to turn for answers under such times when there is so much falling away? It's not going to be to the ministers who from their pulpits can do little more than entertain while telling some stories to illustrate their illustrations, giving a little life principle along the way. It's going to be to those who have preserved God's truth in serious and deep understanding. The Lord uses such times to gather his remnant, purify his church, to cast away the chaff who name his name but don't serve him, to strengthen and grow the kernel that knows him. There has to be a place warm and strong to go.

What if he wills to use faithful churches? What if he wills to use these Protestant Reformed churches even in such of a way that he has not before for the strength of the church in the times to come? What if the time comes when the words of Mordechai to Esther become the words of the Spirit to us, "For if thou altogether holdest thy peace at this time, then shall there enlargement and deliverance arise to the Jews from another place; but who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?"

The answer, people of God, to the question then, what shall we do, is that we must avoid two ditches, two ditches which are always a problem for the church in every age, a temptation for the church in every age, but maybe moreso under times of duress. First, we must avoid the temptation where out of our concern to preserve the grand truths of God's word, temptation is to hole up and sit upon that glorious heritage that's been given and lose a zeal for the publishing of the grand things of Jehovah God and love for the neighbor. And the other ditch we are to avoid, to avoid the temptation out of our good and grand concern to publish the things of God, the temptation to then let go of some of those grand truths that have come down to us from this Reformation that we celebrate tonight and that have been preserved in faithful churches the temptation to dull some of that truth, to let part of it go. The temptation to not do what Ezra did when he was on his way to the Promised Land from the Babylonian captivity and was given all the treasures of the house of God, all the gold and all the silver of the house of God, how he protected

all of it; he wouldn't let one piece of gold be stolen away. Preserve the truths of God's word.

The calling is the same as it was for the church in Philadelphia, the calling is the same as it was at the time of the Reformation, to preserve and to publish. The faithful church does both. Not one or the other only but both. The night comes when no man can work but that night is not here yet. There is important work to be done at all levels. Let us hold fast our convictions. Let us grow in areas of weakness if we see that and serve Jehovah God with the truths of his word, the truths that the church world needs at this time, a spiritual antithesis that will preserve the church distinct from this world; a sovereign grace of power, God's sovereignty to save his people and preserve them. The truths of marriage and family. Marriage is an unbreakable bond. That's what this church world needs in this day and age. God's grand covenant of believers and their children, an unconditional covenant. O God, the children. Think of the children the next 25, 50 years. Preserve the children by the truths of the word. Things like a catechism program that can train them in the truths of God's word from their youth up. Things like the systematic teaching of God's word to the people of God so that they are not blown away by every wind of doctrine.

And let's be faithful, humble but confident and pray that an open door, if it is God's will, as God as we have seen often gives them under such times as are likely coming. It doesn't matter that we're small, small as the faithful in the midst of the world, small is a denomination of churches, small as a congregation here, the church in Philadelphia was small. Christ said, "You had a little strength, if you only had a little strength," but yet God would give an open door to them and not to the other bigger apostatizing churches in Revelation 2 and 3.

The Lord Jesus Christ, King of the church, who held the key of David, opened and no man shut and shut and no man opened, at the time of Revelation 3 who held that key yet to the time of the Reformation still holds the key of the kingdom, he is the one who opens and shuts the door. He's not bound by our expectations, be they positive or negative. He's not bound by our timeline whatever it is. He is sovereign and sovereign over any results, many or little or none. Ours is to be faithful and to labor with an eye to his glory come what may and be thankful that it's not only that little church that received the promise at the end of Revelation 3, but the church of all ages and us too, "Behold, I come quickly: hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown. Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out: and I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, which is new Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from my God: and I will write upon him my new name. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches."

Thank you for your attention.