



Revelation 3:7

MW Advent 3, Dec. 10, 2025
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"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 doors are closing." Sometimes, that's just not what you want to hear. If you were living in a big city, running late one morning while trying to catch the train—"the doors are closing"—that'll set you back even further. Or if you overslept and were running late for a flight; you're checking your watch as you wait to be cleared by security, you're running through the terminal to the gate, and then, as you arrive, you watch as the flight attendants close and seal the door. Too late! That's a terrible feeling.

Maybe you've never experienced the door of a plane or a train closing on you. But, how about a door slammed on you by an upset teenager? Or a door that swings shut in your face because the person in front of you couldn't be bothered to hold it open? Or a door held shut by your siblings and friends who don't want you to play with them? Or how about a metaphorical door that closes on you because the person you're trying to reach out to just doesn't want anything to do with you? Closed doors, we don't like those at all.

But far worse than all of that would be the doors of heaven being slammed shut in your face. Perhaps you've worried about that before. Maybe you've been concerned at times that you could go through this whole life *hoping* to go to heaven, and then you find yourself on the outside looking in, the gates of paradise swinging closed as you walk up. It would make sense if that were the case, after all, we know what we're like. We *know* we don't deserve to enter paradise. Well, what if God agrees? What if God looked at you in that situation and said, "Why would I let *you* in?"

How do we know that heaven is not just one more door that will be slammed shut to us? Well, this evening's "O" Antiphon addresses Jesus as the "Key of David," and He is rightly identified as not only the one who *unlocks* the doors of paradise but also as the one holds the doors open to sinners like us:

**"O Key of David and Scepter of the house of Israel,
You open and no one can close, You close and no one can open:
Come and rescue the prisoners who are in darkness and the shadow of death."**

There are two times in the Bible where we can find the term, "Key of David." The second time is here in our text from Revelation. The first time comes from Isaiah 22, where it's spoken of in reference to two men named Shebna and Eliakim. Shebna and Eliakim were both servants in the house of faithful King Hezekiah during the time when the Assyrians were threatening to destroy Jerusalem.

Shebna was the chief steward of the King's house, second-in-command over all Jerusalem. And while we don't know all the details, Shebna had been abusing his position. Here is what the LORD told Isaiah to say to Shebna: ***"Come, go to this steward, to Shebna, who is over the household, and say to him: What have you to do here, and whom have you here, that you have cut out here a tomb for yourself, you who cut out a tomb on the height and carve a dwelling for yourself in the rock? Behold, the LORD will hurl you away violently, O you strong man. He will seize firm hold on you and***

whirl you around and around, and throw you like a ball into a wide land. There you shall die, and there shall be your glorious chariots, you shame of your master's house. I will thrust you from your office, and you will be pulled down from your station.” (Isaiah 22:15-19)

Shebna had evidently let the power go to his head. Some theorize that he had been conspiring with the King of Assyria against King Hezekiah. Or in his role as keeper of the keys, perhaps he had been abusing his authority, dictating who could or could not see the king, and for self-serving reasons. Perhaps he was accepting bribes. We don't know exactly, but we do know who his successor was.

“In that day I will call my servant Eliakim the son of Hilkiah, 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. 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.”

(Isaiah 22:20-22)

The Key of David would be given to Eliakim, and *he* would hold the authority in Jerusalem. He would be the one to open and close the doors; *he* would decide who could get in to see the king. But unlike Shebna, Eliakim would serve in this position as ***“a father to the inhabitants of Jerusalem and to the house of Judah,”***—not *self-serving* but rather serving the people with special concern and tender love, just like a father shows to his children.

Now, other than that section from Isaiah 22, we don't hear anything about the Key of David again until the last book of the Bible. There that key is mentioned once more, in our sermon text: ***“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 exact words formerly spoken of Eliakim are repeated, but now we find this Key in the hands of someone else. Who is now holding the Key? And what doors will He use the key to open?

If we add a bit of context from the following verses, it all becomes much clearer. ***“The holy one, the true one, who has the key of David,”*** is speaking these words to the church at Philadelphia, and He says to them, ***“Behold, I have set before you an open door, which no one is able to shut. . . I am coming soon. Hold fast what you have, so that no one may seize your crown. 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.”*** (Revelation 3:8, 11-12)

Who is this ***“Holy one, the true one,”*** the one who is ***“coming soon,”***—that's Jesus! And He's the one identified as holding this Key! A Key which He uses *not* to let people in to see the king in *Jerusalem*, no, this is an *eternal* kingdom that He speaks of. ***“The temple of my God,” “The city of my God,” “The New Jerusalem.”*** In short, with this Key of David, Jesus opens the doors of heaven. And with these words in Revelation precisely echoing the words spoken of Eliakim, we ought to keep that picture of Eliakim in mind as we consider how *Jesus* would use this Key. Like a father to children, with faithful love and special concern, Jesus uses this Key to open the door, to let people in to see the King.

If it were not for Jesus holding that Key to heaven, then we would by no means enter to see the King. Ever since the Garden of Eden had been sealed shut to Adam and Eve, that angelic guard set to ensure no one could break in, mankind's natural conclusion could only be "shut out of paradise." But when another door was sealed, and another guard had been set to ensure that no one could break in—that door burst open, and the dead did not stay dead. And that was Jesus, who **"was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification."** (Romans 4:25) And now, He declares to you, **"Fear not, I am the first and the last, and the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades."** (Revelation 1:17-18)

Jesus holds the Keys. He **"has the key of David!"** He's the One who **"opens and no one will shut, who shuts and no one opens."** He is the *final* authority on who can get in to see the King. He has the final say. He is the one who opens the door.

And that's exactly what Jesus came to do—*open the door*. That's what He was doing while He dined with tax collectors and sinners. That's what He was doing when He announced to a paralyzed man, **"Take heart, my son; your sins are forgiven."** (Matthew 9:2) That's what He was doing when He declared of the sinful woman, **"I tell you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven."** (Luke 7:47) That's what He was doing when He told the dying criminal, **"Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise."** (Luke 23:43)

And the same thing, the *very* same thing—that's what He has done for each of you. That's what He's done for you here this evening, when we confessed our sins and heard the good news that each one has been forgiven. In fact, He assures us: **"If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."** (1 John 1:9) When that word of confession was spoken, sin was named. And when forgiveness was proclaimed, when forgiveness was worded out in response—it was valid and certain in heaven also as if Christ our dear Lord were dealing with us Himself. For He says, **"If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them."** (John 20:23) This was nothing less than heaven's doors being unlocked and swung open to each of you! For, **"If the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed."** (John 8:36)

And so, you don't have to worry about whether or not heaven's doors will be slammed shut in your face because of your sins. With Jesus holding the Key—Jesus, the Key of David Himself—there's no question. For if He is holding the Key—the one who was born for you, who lived His life for you, who suffered for you, who died for you, who rose again for you, who gives His body and blood to you, all so that you would be set *free* from your sins—if He is holding the Key, there's no doubt about it. For *you*, heaven has been unlocked and Jesus is holding open the door. And so, we can pray with confidence:

"O Key of David and Scepter of the house of Israel, You open and no one can close, You close and no one can open: Come and rescue the prisoners who are in darkness and the shadow of death." Amen.

"And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." (Philippians 4:7) Amen.