

*We exist to make disciples who delight in God and make Him known
by proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ.*

The Faithful Church

Revelation 3:7-13

Keywords: Revelation, prophecy, End Times, Jesus Christ, Seven Churches, Philadelphia, Rapture

PowerPoint Presentation included: None

SermonAudio Blurb: The church in Philadelphia, one of two mentioned by Jesus Christ as being true and faithful. Here is a church patiently enduring and faithfully keeping the Word of God. The result is a wonderful promise of the Lord strengthening them and protecting them in the midst of hardship and tribulation. It serves as an encouragement

I. Introduction.

A. Read 3:7-13.

1. We come to one of the passages that I think most resembles the state of the church in America. Therefore it is certainly one that deserves our close attention.
2. This letter is one that concerns me most because it describes a church that thinks it is well and it isn't. It sees itself in a vastly different way than the Lord of the Church.
3. Self-deception and rationalization are very powerful forces in the minds of mankind, both individually and corporately.
4. In other words, it is easy to study this passage, preach this passage, or listen to this passage and think it is for other churches. I want us to simply hear and consider. To lift up a prayer to our Lord that asks Him to show us ourselves more clearly.

B. Philadelphia:

1. Philadelphia, which means "brotherly love," was situated in Lydia along the Hermus River valley about 38 miles southeast of Sardis.
2. It was backed by volcanic cliffs and though the land was rich and fertile from the volcanic residue, Philadelphia was a dangerous place to live due the many earthquakes experienced by the region.
3. Because of its location, the city was in constant danger of earthquakes and experienced shocks as an everyday occurrence.

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- a. As a result, many of its inhabitants chose to live in huts outside the city in the open country for years after the earthquake.
 - b. Note the allusion to this in the promise of 3:12, “and he will not go out from it any more.”
 - c. The Roman emperor Tiberius provided substantial help in rebuilding the city after its major calamity. In return, Philadelphia joined the other cities that received help in erecting a monument in Rome as visible evidence of their gratitude. . . . Another response to the emperor’s kindness was the adoption of a new city name, . . . Neocaesarea.” (Thomas, R. L. (1992). *Revelation 1-7: an exegetical commentary* (pp. 271–272). Chicago: Moody Publishers.)
4. Like Athens, Philadelphia was a temple warden and gave to the emperor the title “The Son of the Holy One.” It is undoubtedly for this reason the Lord is called, “He who is holy, who is true” in verse 7.
- C. The symbols of the ‘crown’ and the ‘temple’ mentioned in verses 11 and 12 are undoubtedly allusions by way of contrast with the games and religious festivals that were a part of life in the city of Philadelphia.
- D. In contrast with the instability of life in a city prone to daily earthquakes, those who ‘overcome’ are promised the ultimate stability of being rewarded with special privileges in the temple of God.
- E. In addition to all of this it is also worthy of our attention that this church and Smyrna are the only two churches without a rebuke.
1. Why? What makes them similar? Both of them were experiencing hardships and trials due to their faith and they were standing firm in the midst of them.
 2. We are often tempted to think that adversity and opposition is the reason for our present failures in our spiritual lives, when in reality the exact opposite is true.
 3. The final church that we will study, the church of Laodicea (3:14-22), was the one church that seemed to be relatively free of adversity, yet they were lukewarm and were vomited out of Christ’s mouth.
 4. The love of comfort and safety is an idol that seems to be good yet never truly delivers.
- F. Jesus’ self-description:

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1. In contrast to the previous five letters, Jesus does not identify Himself with language from Rev 1:12-18.
2. In light of the faithfulness of Philadelphia, Jesus uses three descriptions that would encourage and reassure these believers. He is the One who is holy, true, and sovereign.
 - a. “Holy.”
 - (1) “He who is holy” asserts the Savior’s deity as the absolutely righteous One, the One totally set apart from sin. In Isaiah 40:25, Yahweh calls Himself “The Holy One.”
 - (2) It is a title of deity and contrasts Him with the claims of Emperor worship.
 - b. “True.”
 - (1) The word “true” means “genuine,” “trustworthy” or “authentic.
 - (2) The very character of Jesus is truth. He defines true. Something so very important to grasp—there is not some body of ‘truth’ that stands outside of God. He is who tells us what is true.
 - (3) It speaks not only to the essence of Jesus Christ but also to the fact that all judgments, proclamations, and statements from Him are true.
 - (4) In 6:10 these two terms are clearly attached to God, “. . . they cried out with a loud voice, saying, ‘How long, O Lord, holy and true, will You refrain from judging and avenging our blood on those who dwell on the earth?’”
 - (a) Note how these two terms are used there to speak of judgment.
 - (b) Because God is holy and because He true then judgment must come upon all who are rebels against Him.
 - (5) And so Jesus is speaking to this church as the One who is holy and true in His assessments and judgments. What He declares to this church is truth that they can embrace and act upon.

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- c. “The key of David.”
 - (1) The final description refers to Jesus as the One with “the key of David” who can open and shut doors.
 - (2) This is a reference to the prophet Isaiah in chapter 22.
 - (a) The nation was in great rebellion and Isaiah writes this section with great emotion and heartache at their stubborn hearts as God presses down upon them in punishment.
 - (b) But sin and rebellion is strange for even though God is clearly bringing their enemies upon them, instead of a broken heart and turning from sin to God again we find them having parties. They say, “Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we may die.”
 - (c) Then Isaiah is instructed to go to the chief steward of the royal household and inform him that due to his evil and gross unfaithfulness to his task that he is going to be removed from office and become an object of great shame.
 - (d) Apparently Shebna had used his position to allow only those favorable to him and to his ideology into the king’s presence. God sent Shebna in exile to Babylon.
 - (e) God then replaced him with Eliakim, giving him the “key of David. This gave Eliakim access to all of David’s riches.
 - (3) In a similar but far greater way, Jesus, as the heir of David’s covenant, has been given all authority to grant entrance into heaven and eternity (Revelation 3:12, 21-22; cf. 1:18).
 - (4) The possession of this key means that He has absolute power to open and close.
 - (a) Beloved, just this alone should give you much joy if you will let it sink into your soul.

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- (b) The bible describes Satan as our great enemy. He is busy making accusations against us. But we need not fear him, for he does not hold this key—Jesus does.
 - (c) Jesus is the One who overcame our great enemies. And no one exists who can resist or change that glorious reality.
- G. So the sovereign Lord, who grants not only full forgiveness to you and I but also keeps us safe until He puts away all our enemies, speaks to this church, this faithful church.

II. The Faithful Church.

- A. He knows their deeds (8a).
- 1. This is something He keeps saying to each church and it is worth noting yet again for ourselves.
 - 2. In the letter to the next church Jesus' knowledge is a frightening thing, for His gaze strips through all of the church's efforts to appear to be godly when it is not.
 - 3. But here it is encouraging for He knows that they not only heard His word but they kept it. They were not Christian in name only but in their lives.
 - 4. Matthew 6 speaks to the idea of seeking to be seen by man in our actions versus being content simply to quietly live out our faith in Jesus Christ. Repeatedly Jesus says that our Father sees what we do in secret and He will reward us.
- B. The door opened by Jesus (8b).
- 1. Philadelphia was founded for a special purpose and with a special intention.
 - a. It was situated where the borders of Mysia, Lydia and Phrygia met. It was a border town.
 - b. But it was not as a garrison town that Philadelphia was founded, for there was little danger there.
 - c. It was founded with the deliberated intention that it might be a missionary of Greek culture and the Greek language to Lydia and

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Phrygia and by A.D. 19 the Lydians had forgotten their own Lydian language and were essentially now Greeks.

- d. That is what Jesus means when He speaks of the open door that is set before Philadelphia.
 - e. Three centuries before Philadelphia had been given an open door to spread Greek ideas in the lands beyond; and now there has come to it another great missionary opportunity, an open door to carry to men who never knew it the message of the love of Jesus Christ.
2. Notice that Jesus has given this open door. . . but why won't it be shut?
- a. Because . . . (8b).
 - (1) "little power" probably refers to their small number.
 - (2) "kept My word."
 - (a) Keeping God's Word and keeping our hearts dependent on and close to Him go hand in hand.
 - i) My son, give attention to my words; Incline your ear to my sayings. Do not let them depart from your sight; Keep them in the midst of your heart. For they are life to those who find them And health to all their body. Watch over your heart with all diligence, For from it flow the springs of life. (Proverbs 4:20-23)
 - (b) "Kept" is used in various ways: "to watch over, guard, keep, preserve" and "give heed to, pay attention to, observe" especially of the Law, or the Word, or teaching, etc.
 - (c) They were committed to the Word of God. It really is that simple.
 - i) They were not merely acquiring knowledge.
 - ii) They were acquiring biblical knowledge so that they might faithfully follow and honor their Lord in their day-to-day lives.

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- (3) “not denied my Name.”
 - (a) “And have not denied My Name.” This speaks of their spiritual fidelity and separation from the world.
 - (b) Remember, one may confess the Lord with his mouth and yet, in some way, deny Him with a life that is inconsistent with the truth of Scripture or the character of Christ.
- b. The issue is this, God has given them an open door to use for the Kingdom. And they were taking advantage of it and faithfully using it.
- c. And therefore He was keeping it open.
 - (1) May this be true for Missio. May we not be found guilty of having the name of pursuing God’s mission without the reality of doing so.
 - (2) May God keep open the door for us to go forward in ministry and the gospel.
3. There are two points to ponder here.
 - a. First, open doors of opportunities are gifts from the Savior because without Him, they would not open. Therefore, no matter how hard we think we have worked to open the doors to this ministry we need to recognize the sovereign hand of our Lord.
 - b. Second, open doors are trusts given to us for faithful stewardship just as with our spiritual gifts or our finances.
 - (1) This is true for Missio as a whole. The elders covet your prayers as we look forward in how best to lead this congregation. It is not easy and we find ourselves often pausing because we are not sure.
 - (2) But it is also true for you as individuals. Has God given you an open door to serve others in the love of Christ? Is there an open door to speak to someone about Jesus Christ? Are you being faithful in that?

C. Synagogue of Satan:

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1. “Those of the synagogue of Satan.”
 - a. There was a large Jewish presence there and they were actively oppressing the church.
 - b. In our pluralistic country this sounds a bit harsh but it is truly an accurate image. The Jews should have rejoiced to hear of their promised Lord but, in reality, they opposed Him and all who followed Him.
 2. John 8:41-47.
- D. The promise of Jesus:
1. I will keep you from the hour of testing.
 2. It is “the” hour of trial. The presence of the Greek article specifies this as a very specific time of testing.
 3. It is to come upon the whole world.
 4. Finally, it is designed to test a certain category of people defined as “those who dwell upon the earth.” Literally they are characterized as “earth dwellers.”
 - a. In the book of Revelation it is basically a technical term for unbelievers because they are earth-dwellers. This is their realm and they are bound to this life and what it can give (cf. 6:10; 8:13; 11:10; 13:8, 14; 17:8; Isa. 24:17f).
 - b. In contrast to believers who are to think and live as sojourners or aliens, the earth-dweller is quite at home on earth.
 5. “The hour of trial,” sometimes referred to as “the Tribulation,” refers to the time of wrath or judgment described in chapters 6-19.
 - a. This is the same as Daniel’s Seventieth Week (Daniel 9:27)
 - b. It is also called the time of Jacob’s trouble/distress in the prophet Jeremiah and describes a time of unparalleled trouble. “Alas! for that day is great, There is none like it; And it is the time of Jacob's distress” (Jeremiah 30:7)
 6. What is significant here is that they were promised to be kept “*ek*” this tribulation.

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7. Speak to the issue of “rapture” as it carries so much baggage, both good and bad. Every position believes in the rapture whether they call it that or not.
 8. There is a wordplay going on in this verse that helps us see what He is meaning.
 - a. They kept His word. Think “guard, treasure or protect” in meaning. James uses this in a similar way when he writes, “Pure and undefiled religion in the sight of our God and Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world.” (James 1:27)
 - b. And in a similar way Jesus promises to protect these precious believers.
 - (1) John 17:15.
 - (2) John 16:33. Notice here the use of “overcoming” and how it is used almost ironically. In this age we have tribulation, but we also have peace. Why? Because Jesus has overcome this age.
 - (3) And Jesus promises this faithful church that He will protect them in the time of the Great Tribulation.
- E. The Challenge (11). “I am coming quickly.”
1. The word “quickly” means “suddenly, unexpectedly, without announcement.” When Jesus comes the event will unfold rapidly.
 - a. It will happen with one fell swoop.
 - b. Yet, it is important for us to recognize that it does not mean “soon.”
 2. Much evil has occurred over people seeking to set a time frame as to the coming of our Lord. We don’t know when He is coming, only that it will be unexpected.
- F. The final promise to the overcomer, three specific rewards:
1. First, Jesus says, “I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God.”
 - a. The New Testament teaches that for the past 2,000 years a spiritual temple called “the church” has been in the process of being built.

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- b. Paul and Peter tell us that every believer is a living stone in this spiritual temple (Ephesians 2:19-22; 1 Peter 2:5).
 - c. However, in Revelation 21:22, John records that in the eternal realm there will be no physical temple, “for the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb are its temple.”
 - d. By describing them as a pillar in this context He is speaking to the intimacy and prominence they shall have in eternity.
2. The second reward promised is that “he who overcomes will not go out anymore.”
 - a. The overcomer has a fixed eternal place of honor in the sanctuary of God.
 - b. There will be no more rejection and persecution, only approval and blessing.
 - c. This has a special meaning for them as every time the ground would rumble they had to leave their homes
 3. The final reward Jesus promises the overcomer is that he will have three special names: the name of God (signifying His ownership), the city of God, the New Jerusalem (signifying citizenship in the heavenly city), and Christ’s new name (the full revelation of His character and special intimacy with Christ in His kingdom).

III. Conclusion.

- A. We see in this short letter the reason for us to continue to press forward in following our Lord.
 1. He sees us. He knows our thoughts and our actions. And He rewards us in light of them.
 2. The promise is a good one, to dwell with Him for all eternity. To be a partaker of His Kingdom and to enjoy it for all time.
- B. We also are reminded that all things are ultimately and fully in His control.
 1. In this we have peace, for He has overcome our enemies.
 2. In this we have encouragement as we often face uncertainties in our ability to discern a wise course.

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IV. Benediction/Doxology.

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope.

Small Group Questions

- **No questions because of Mothers Day.**