

## The Lord, Judge, and King Is Coming

Revelation 3:7–13

<sup>7</sup> “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.

<sup>8</sup> “I know your works. Behold, I have set before you an open door, which no one is able to shut. I know that you have but little power, and yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name. <sup>9</sup> Behold, I will make those of the synagogue of Satan who say that they are Jews and are not, but lie—behold, I will make them come and bow down before your feet, and they will learn that I have loved you. <sup>10</sup> Because you have kept my word about patient endurance, I will keep you from the hour of trial that is coming on the whole world, to try those who dwell on the earth. <sup>11</sup> I am coming soon. Hold fast what you have, so that no one may seize your crown. <sup>12</sup> 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. <sup>13</sup> He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.’

### PRAY

#### The Holy Lord — vv. 7–8

Jesus is **the Holy One**. This is a very significant title rooted in the Old Testament and particularly used by the prophet Isaiah. Indeed, this letter to Philadelphia has several allusions to Isaiah that we don’t have time to delve into, but would make an excellent study. Some combination of either **the Holy One** or **the Holy One of Israel** is used 28 times in Isaiah. We’ll see in a moment that there are those who claimed to be God’s people, but were denying that Jesus was the Messiah; they denied Christ’s deity. So this title has a double meaning to it. Jesus **is** the one who is holy, holy, holy. But this is also a gracious confirmation to Philadelphians that Jesus is indeed God, the Great I Am. So it serves to rebuke those who claimed to be God’s people but denied that Jesus is God. Further, he is **the True One** — **true** used in the sense of **genuine**. Paired with the title of **the Holy One**, it means he is the real deal. He truly is the Sovereign Lord. Again, a rebuke to those who deny his deity.

As the one who **has the key of David**, he has, as Robert Mounce describes, “complete control over the royal household.” He has the “undisputed authority to admit or exclude from the New

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Jerusalem.”<sup>1</sup> The phony Jews who probably put them out of the temple and tried to exclude them, cancel them from life... They are not the ones who are the gate keeper. Jesus is. He is the sovereign Lord **who opens and no one will shut, who shuts and no one opens**. He is the one who says in **Isaiah 46:9–11** — “... I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done, saying, ‘My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all my purpose,’ calling a bird of prey from the east, the man of my counsel from a far country. I have spoken, and I will bring it to pass; I have purposed, and I will do it. This is the Lord Jesus. ***Rejoice! the Lord is King! Your Lord and King adore!***

**V. 8** begins by reminding us what we have seen repeatedly: **Jesus knows**. Nothing is hidden from his sight; everything is laid bare before him to whom we must give account. He knows their works — and unlike most of the other churches, there is no disapproval of their doctrine, or diligence, or endurance. They are holding to God’s word and holding to their faith in Christ. The Lord proves what he had just described about himself: He **opened a door for them that no one can shut**. Paul uses the metaphor of an open door three times (1 Corinthians 16:9; 2 Corinthians 2:12; Colossians 4:3) to describe a great missional opportunity to preach and advance the Gospel. In similar fashion the Lord opened the door for them through his grace. As they faithfully served, God swung wide doors in proportion to their faithful work. The fact that they were located on a busy trade route may be part of door opened for their missional work. God had them in a strategic place and he was going to accomplish all he intended through the means of their faithful work. They encountered all those who were in Philadelphia for business, declaring God’s grace and glory — sharing their Gospel thread, if you will — and God was using them, even in a hostile world, to bring others to faith. As those new converts returned to their own cities and homes they took the Gospel of Christ with them. The door for ministry was opened by Jesus for his purposes. No one was going to thwart his plan.

The parable of the talents has some application for us. Faithful over little; God will make you faithful over much. Let’s stay focused and faithful, then, Redeemer’s Grace... not growing weary in doing good as the Sardisians were doing. Let’s keep our noses to the grind stone, being faithful in serving the Lord, faithful in proclaiming the Gospel. Let’s be in a place to hear the Lord say, “You have been faithful, and I’m opening a door for great mission work.” Let’s faithfully be about the work of God’s mission in our personal mission fields, but also be launching our children — and even adults and families — into great Gospel service through the door that God opens for us.

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<sup>1</sup> The Book of Revelation, Robert Mounce. William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., Grand Rapids, MI; 1977.

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*His kingdom cannot fail! He rules o'er earth and heaven.*

*The keys of death and Hell are to our Jesus given.*

*Lift up your heart! Lift up your voice, rejoice! Again I say, rejoice!*

#### **His Faithful Church — vv. 8b, 10, 11**

Philadelphia joins the church of Smyrna in making the two out seven churches which were not rebuked by the Lord. Let's make a quick evaluation and see what Jesus does and doesn't consider significant.

In the middle of v. 8 — they have little power. This probably refers to their size — they were like a small church. Numbers and influence in the culture or their community were not what garnered the Lord's attention. They probably didn't have a celebrity pastor. They didn't have marquee ministries. Doesn't really feel like they had a hip vibe or a celebrity pastor. (Which gives me hope.) Those things were not the basis on which the Lord commended them or opened a door for ministry.

What does Jesus notice about them? Two things:

- They have kept his word. They were reading their bibles. They were adjusting their lives to it. That same phrase shows up again in v. 10. They are keeping his word in the face of tremendous pressure to cave and do otherwise.
- They have not denied his name. In others, they were keeping the faith. When the culture demanded they renounce the exclusivity of Christ as Lord, or else — they said, Jesus is Lord. We know this. We can't deny who he is.

When God chooses to open a door, it will be for those who are keeping his word; giving themselves to know more of his word; adjusting their lives to his word. And those who are not denying him for the sake of security or convenience. Let's be careful to get ahold of this: Missional opportunity, Gospel ministry, missional success is not granted by the Lord on the basis of size, bank account, or influence. God simply blesses and provides an opportunity for those who are faithful to his word and hold fast to their faith. What was Luther's famous retort to those who demanded he recant of his singular fidelity to God's word? "My conscience is captive to the word of God. Here I stand; I can do no other. God help me."

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There's not a thing new in that, is there? What does fruitfulness in the Kingdom look like as John quotes Jesus in chapter 15 of his Gospel? How is it that our lives are made fruitful for Christ?

**John 15:4–5, 8 — Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. <sup>5</sup>I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. ... <sup>8</sup>By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples.**

Philadelphia, you've discovered the secret, which is really no secret at all. Abide in the Lord. This is the greatest work. Abide in his word. Walk in loving communion with him. As you grow deeper in your knowledge and relationship with him, he opens doors for you to faithfully declare his Gospel.

We have mentioned already that their walk with Christ and their work for Christ is not in an easy context. We already know hostile, pagan world these churches were in. Now we have this aggravated assault from Jews who claimed to worship God, but rejected Christ. They were ethnic Jews, and so had both national identity of being God's children, and religious heritage. But the Kingdom is not made up of favored nationality, ethnicity, or religious heritage. The kingdom is composed of those who have their blind eyes opened by God to the beauty and goodness of the Lord Jesus, and then place their faith in him.

These Jews in Philadelphia were holding onto what could not save. They are under the darkened control of Satan, as 2 Corinthians 4:4 says — ... **the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God**. Since they are under the control of Satan, Jesus says their false worship of the God of their imagination is simply Satan worship. Jesus had a similar encounter during his earthly ministry with the Pharisees in **John 8**. They were denying his deity. His harshest words were directed at those who would lead people away from him, or cause faith in him to weaken or die completely. His response to their lies and unbelief, in John 8:44a — **You are of your father the devil...**

Beloved there is nothing new under the sun and we are in a day when people want to remake Christ into their image, or craft a god of their imagination to suit their lifestyle. There is one God, and one mediator between God and man: the Lord Jesus Christ. (1 Timothy 2:5) He is fully God. (John 1:1–2; Colossians 1:15–20) He is the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father but by him. (John 14:6) Any statement or assertion of anything other than what Jesus has said about himself is a

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lie, and it is made by someone who is unbelieving, and under the influence of **the god of this world who has blinded the minds of the unbelievers to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God**. There is no room for tolerance, or variance, or variety of belief in this matter. Any such variance from Christ as he presents himself in the Scripture leaves one in the deadly grip of sin and unbelief, regardless of how sincere they may be, regardless of their religious heritage, regardless of their nationality. Let us be Philadelphians, faithfully declaring the truth of Christ, holding fast to his name, that others may be delivered from the satanic reign of death and spiritual blindness.

### **The Judge's Justice — vv. 9, 10**

Those who refuse to bow the knee to Christ in this life will ultimately be brought to bow the knee before Jesus, their Judge, in the next. One of the high passages of praise in the New Testament, in **Philippians 2** — **<sup>9</sup> Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, <sup>10</sup> so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, <sup>11</sup> and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.** Every knee will bow.

But here in **Revelation 3** we get a little more insight into their submissive bowing. Those who have hated and persecuted the church declaring the Lord's church to be false... they will be bow before the church and admit that God has loved them. It will be total repudiation of their unbelief and contempt for the people of God. I mentioned parallels between the letter to Philadelphia and Isaiah. Isaiah 60 deals with the future glory of God's people and how God will punish the nations that rebelled against him, and bless his people in the eternal kingdom.

**Vvs 9–12** introduce a three-fold reward for faithfulness that God gives to his children. This 3-part blessing is a **Messianic reversal of rebellion and unbelief that fueled the persecution that was being poured out on God's people**, and hearkens to Isaiah's prophesy.

- **First, in v. 9, God's people are validated before their enemies**. God will make false professors and persecutors come acknowledge that those in Christ are indeed God's people and that God loves them. **v. 9** — **I will make them come and bow down before your feet, and they will learn that I have loved you**. So, (1<sup>st</sup>) God's people are validated before their enemies.

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- **Second**, God's people are delivered from the final period of testing. That's in v. 10 — **I will keep you from the hour of trial that is coming on the whole world**.
- **Third**, God's people have security in the coming age, v. 12 — **I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God. Never shall he go out of it**.

This 3-fold blessing, introduced here, repeats throughout the remainder of the book of Revelation in various ways and places.

**The hour of trial** described in v. 10 is not referring to the trial of suffering the church is enduring at the hands of the unbelieving, rebellious world. **The hour of trial** is the suffering that Jesus will inflict by his hand on the whole world — unbelieving, rebellious system that opposes his rule and reign. It is the period of testing and tribulation that precedes the establishment of his eternal Kingdom. When Jesus executes this judgment, the church in Philadelphia will be spared.

A brief reminder, as we saw in Smyrna, God limits suffering. We may endure a very difficult season, but it is a season — it's not forever. For 10 days in Smyrna, the devil will throw you in jail — whether figurative or literal 10 days. Philadelphia, you've endured much at the hands of the world, but when I pour out my wrath on them — and I'm coming to do exactly that — you will be spared what is coming.

### **The Coming King's Reward —**

Moving quickly through the last section, Jesus is coming. There is a literal return of the King to earth to establish his eternal kingdom. And the coming is soon! This is an earnest encouragement for us. In light of eternity — **eternity!** — whatever time we endure persecution will seem insignificantly short. I know it doesn't feel like it now — but we need to inform our earth-bound selves, made out of dust, who only know a few decades that King Jesus is coming soon, and it will make all of this seem like the blink of an eye. So we don't lose heart. His reward is with him — and he is the reward!

In the midst of difficulties our assignment is to continue to do what we have been doing, as v. 11 says — hold fast to what you have. What do they have to hold to? The word of God and their faith, as they were doing in v. 8. Keep the main thing the main thing. Walk with Christ, abide in him and his word. As you do that now, as you put down roots into God's kingdom now, God will make you a pillar in his temple. What does mean? The temple is the dwelling place of God — so we will dwell with God. The

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imagery of a pillar invokes stability and permanence. We will dwell with God forever. We'll never go out or be put out. Citizens in the kingdom are not shaken away or destroyed in his kingdom.

Then we have this beautiful 3-fold reason for why we will endure forever in God's kingdom. It is because God effects our salvation. It is his enduring work from start to finish — **v. 12**

**I will write on him the name of my God** — ADOPTION

**and the name of the city of my God** — CITIZENSHIP

**and my own new name** — CONFORMITY to Christ's character. Finally, the work of sanctification in this life completed, that we look and act like Jesus. We are a chip off the ol' block, and like one identical twin who is confused for the other, we are called by his name rather than our own.

ADOPTION, CITIZENSHIP, CONFORMITY. Who is doing that work? Jesus does all of it.

**Philippians 1:6** — ... **he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of**

**Jesus Christ.** This is part of the doctrine we call the Perseverance of the saints. Those who are saved will persevere to the end and be saved because they have been adopted as children of God.

As children of God, they have a new citizenship in his eternal Kingdom. And citizens of the King's kingdom are conformed to the image of the King. God begins the work by adopting us, progresses the work by molding us, and completes the work, sustaining us in the eternal kingdom. Hallelujah!

***Rejoice in glorious hope! Our Lord and Judge shall come  
and take his servants up to their eternal home.***

***Lift up your heart, Lift up your voice!***

***Rejoice, again I say, rejoice!***

**PRAY**

**GOSPEL THREAD**

**LORD'S SUPPER**