

Philadelphia – The Faithful Church

Revelation 3:7-13

Philadelphia is one of the most exciting churches, not only because they were known as a faithful church, which we all want to be, but also because this church prophetically represents the period when the Rapture takes place. I believe we are currently in this church era, and it means the Rapture is that much closer!

Being called faithful means being trustworthy. One of the things that God entrusted them with was His Word, which they kept to a "t." When God gives us His Word, He expects us to faithfully keep it.

Philadelphia means *brotherly love* and was named after the King of Pergamum, Attalus Philadelphus. Interestingly, he was known for his love for his brother, Eumenes II. So, too, the church of Philadelphia and the last days' church will be known by their love as well. I have witnessed this, not only here at Calvary Chapel, but also at other fellowships I have visited. There is a brotherly love that is obvious, and that is how God describes His true church just before the Rapture.

Philadelphia was located about 25 miles southeast of Sardis. It was subject to earthquakes and was rebuilt by Tiberius after an earthquake in AD 17. This is very interesting considering the earthquake we read about last week in Ezekiel 38 and 39 when Russia and the Arab nations attack Israel. We are prophetically in the church of Philadelphia or the church of the Rapture, and it is very possible that the Rapture will take place sometime near this invasion. What makes this even more interesting is that the majority of those in Philadelphia eventually left because of two reasons – earthquakes and warfare. In Ezekiel 38 and 39, Scripture says there will be a great earthquake at the time of the battle. Could it be that another earthquake during the time of the prophetic church of Philadelphia could signal our departure? Only God knows.

It was in a grape-growing district, which led to the god of wine, Bacchus, becoming their chief deity, and even appearing on some of their coins. Although not a large city, it had very good Roman roads, which allowed for an open door to commerce and increased wealth. Consider the description Jesus uses of Himself in this passage. He calls Himself *the open door*.

Philadelphia was a beautiful and picturesque city near the flowing Cogamis River, located on rolling hills, which only made it more attractive. It is the only church, besides Smyrna, to which God gives no condemnation, a testimony to its faithfulness to God and to His Word. That is what He is going to focus on with them.

In our beginning verse, notice how the Lord describes Himself to this body of believers: *He who is holy, true, the One who has the key of David, and He who shuts and no one opens, and opens and no one shuts*. Let's look at the first phrase, *He who is holy*. The Bible declares that the only one who is truly holy in His very essence is God; so, He is not just describing His character, He is also reminding them of His deity. Then He says He is true, which means authentic or genuine. This is such an important descriptor for Jesus, especially when we live in a world that has so many false or substitute Jesuses. What do I mean? Most religions have a *Jesus*, but every one of them is unbiblical and false, except for the true Jesus as He has revealed Himself in Scripture. The Hindu Jesus is one of many gods. The Mormon Jesus is Satan's brother and also one of many gods. The Jehovah's Witnesses' Jesus is a created being and not God Almighty. And Islam's Jesus, or Isa, is not the Son of God, was not crucified, did not resurrect from the dead, is not the Savior of the world, and is subservient to Mohammed. That is not my Jesus, nor the Jesus of the Bible. Jesus said in John 7:38, *He who believes in Me as the Scripture has said, out of HIS heart will flow rivers of living water*. The Scripture He was referring to is what we call the Bible. And it says that Jesus is the Son of God, God Himself, the Savior of the world, the One who died on a cross to save the world, the One who resurrected three days later, the One who is the only pathway into heaven, and the One who now sits at the right hand of the Father as King and Ruler of the universe forever! That's my Jesus, and the Jesus of the Bible!

Notice next He has the *key of David*. To John, this meant that Jesus had all the rights and privileges of the Kingdom of God as promised to the Messiah through David. To have the keys meant He had all access and authority in things pertaining to the Kingdom of God. Next, he was described as *He opens and no one shuts, and shuts and no one opens*. Not only does every door He opens for us remain open, but every door He shuts remains closed unless

He chooses otherwise. He has absolute authority and power. Whatever door the Lord opens for us in ministry, no man nor demon can shut. Our job is simply to be faithful to walk through the doors He opens, and then we will have the victory. It does not mean we won't have opposition or a battle, but it does mean if we are faithful and persistent, we can't be stopped.

In verse eight, knowing their works literally means He knew what they were doing for the Kingdom with perfect clarity. The same is true for us. If we are being faithful to the Lord, God not only knows it, He sees it with perfect clarity. Don't think He doesn't see; He has set before them an open door that no one can shut, and He sets before us an open door that no one can shut. My question is: are you walking through those doors? An open door does no good if you don't walk through it!

Next, He says, *you have a little strength but have kept*, or literally watched over and protected *My Word*. Whenever we do that, be sure God will open doors of ministry for us. If they are not opening, we need to ask ourselves if we are being faithful to God's Word and watching over it and protecting it. For those who do, He will open doors. The church of Philadelphia was true to God's Word, and today's church of Philadelphia is true to God's Word as well. We will be rewarded for that, especially in a day and age when God's Word is followed and believed less and less. It is amazing to see how much compromise there is in the church today when it comes to the clear teaching of God's Word. There is the acceptance of homosexuality, the blending of Christianity with false religions, and even foul language from some pulpits. Yet for those who stand true to His Word, God says there will be great reward. Those who stray, however, will lose their reward.

Next, notice they had *not denied My Name*. In biblical days, your name was who you were; it represented your character. Hence the Lord is saying that the church of Philadelphia was properly representing His character. What a challenge that is for us! Are we properly representing His character individually and as a church?

The Jews of Philadelphia denied Jesus as the Messiah, and because of that, they opposed and caused great trouble for the church. Verse nine says they claimed to be true Jews but were not. They were liars. What did the Lord mean by this? Although many Jews today think they are true, they are not because the Lord says a true Jew of His would believe in Jesus as their Messiah. Notice what He will make these unbelieving Jews do - come and worship before their feet. In other words, they will one day bow down before Jesus and His followers, forced to acknowledge that they were wrong and the Christians were right.

What an important and powerful promise verse ten is! It is in this very verse we see the Rapture of the church as a promise to rescue us from the last days' wrath. He says because they have persevered, which literally means they have displayed staying power in remaining true to God, He will keep them from the hour of trial that will come upon the whole world. Notice two things. First, He will keep them FROM this tribulation, rather than through it. Secondly, He says it is not a localized trial, but a worldwide one. Why is this so important? By saying He will keep them FROM the coming worldwide problems and not through it, He shows that they will not be a part of it but gone! Those of us in this current church of Philadelphia will not go through it either, but we will be gone! Thus, the Rapture has to happen before the tribulation begins. This is why I not only believe in the Rapture, but also in a Pre-Tribulation one. And why is this worldwide tribulation coming? To test those who dwell on the earth; to break them and bring them to their senses that they might be saved.

Quickly, in verse eleven, does not mean that it was about to happen right then, but that when it did occur, it would be fast. It is the word *tachys* which means, *when it happens, it will be fast*. Then He warns them and us to hold fast what we have and let no one take our crown! A crown back then was known by all as the means of reward because that's what was given to kings and victorious athletes. He is saying we need to hold tight to what we have in Jesus, and not to let anyone or anything pull us away and take our coming reward. Did you know you can lose heavenly reward that you have already stored up? It's true! Either by choosing to walk away or by allowing yourself to be pulled away by the world and fall into sin. 2 John 8 says, *Look to yourselves that we do not lose those things we worked for, but that we may receive a full reward*. Don't let anyone or anything take away your reward for serving Him!

Verse twelve says he who overcomes and remains faithful until the end will have numerous and enormous rewards! In addition to our *normal* reward for service here on the earth, we will be pillars in the house of God. A pillar was a symbol of strength and stability in that day. The Lord is saying we will be strong and stable in the

eternal Temple of God. How encouraging for them to hear they would be strong and stable in a city that was so shaky due to regular earthquakes. And how encouraging for us to hear in this last-days world that is anything but stable! Just look at the Middle East today!

Notice, lastly, all of the names that will be written on us at that time: the *Name of His God* or the *Name of the Father*, the name of *city of His God* or *New Jerusalem* which is the new eternal city that will come down from heaven on the new earth, and lastly He will write on us *His Name* which is the most exciting of all, showing we belong to Him and are owned by Him for eternity!

Are you a true Christian in faithfulness to the Lord? If so, you are a part of the church of Philadelphia. As a part of it, the Lord has promised that He will keep you from the tribulation that is coming to test the whole world. Aren't you thankful? More than that, are you ready? Even as the world is beginning to experience testing and trial, the Bible says it is only going to get much worse! Just make sure that you are ready and that you won't be caught with your guard down! Some of you aren't sure of anything. You can be.

Group Study and Personal Application Questions:

1. The church of Philadelphia represents what church era in history? What prophetic event will happen in that era?
2. The faithfulness of the Philadelphian church was recognized by Jesus. What were the two areas they were faithful in?
3. What does the name *Philadelphia* mean and how does that relate to the last days church?
4. V7 – What is meant when Jesus describes Himself as *holy*? How about *true*?
5. Most religions have a Jesus, but all vary in their doctrine concerning Him. How can we know which Jesus is true and what He is like?
6. What is the significance of Jesus holding *the key of David*?
7. Jesus is described as having the ability to open and shut doors that no one else can. How does this encourage and comfort us as we seek to follow Jesus?
8. V8 – What is the significance of Jesus knowing their works?
9. Although they had little strength what were they faithful to do?
10. Why is it important for us to do the same even if we don't have much strength?
11. What did someone's name represent in the time this letter was written? What did Jesus commend them for concerning His name?
12. Consider what these verses say about His name: Ephesians 1:21; Philippians 2:9-11; Psalm 148:13; Psalm 138:2. How important is the name of God and His character to Himself?
13. V10 – What is the Rapture a promise of for the Christian?
14. Why is the worldwide tribulation coming?
15. V11 – What does the word *tachys* mean?
16. How is it possible for the believer to lose heavenly reward?
17. V12 – What is the promised reward for those who overcome and remain faithful?
18. What are the names that will be written on us? What do those names show about us?

Being faithful to Jesus and His Word will become more challenging for us in the days ahead. How we respond to that challenge will define our character.

- What areas of your life need the greatest attention so that you can become more faithful to Him? Has the Lord been opening a door of ministry for you to step into that you haven't yet?