

# ***A SERIES THROUGH THE REVELATION***

## ***PHILADELPHIA: SMALL BUT SIGNIFICANT | 2.10.22***

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### **I. INTRODUCTION**

- A.** Friends, I'm sure tonight that I'm going to share some thoughts with you that will challenge your theology and doctrine, and it's intentional. Currently we are taking the whole of 2022, on Thursday nights to walk through the Book of Revelation verse by verse, and this evening we are looking at the Church of Philadelphia.
- B.** Jesus' address to this Church is significant, both historically, for us presently, and for God's family in the future. Among the verses that we will cover tonight, there is one specific verse that's often used a defense for a pre-tribulation rapture, which is the idea that God will rapture the Church away prior to the Great Tribulation. This is a doctrinal view that I disagree with.
- C.** And tonight, as we get to **Revelation 3:10**, I will share briefly a few thoughts related specifically to what Jesus says, but it will be brief, and in part, because I won't have time to do a fuller treatment on this. But it's my belief, that the Prophets of Old, in the Old Testament, Jesus, and the Apostles of the New Testament present a post tribulation view of Christ's return.
- D.** Now, you might say, why spend time talking about one of the most hotly debated subjects in Church history? Well, because I believe that the Bible calls us to work with the end in mind. This is what Leonard Ravenhill referred to as, "Living in light of eternity." Friends, if we don't think rightly about the future, about Christ's second coming, about the events surrounding Christ's second coming, we simply won't think about them at all.
- E.** Eschatology, which simply means a study of the end-times, is designed by God as a heavy weight that settles upon our shoulders, crushing our lives in the present, in light of the future. When we study the end-times, we take the weight of God's future kingdom and place it squarely on our shoulders, causing us to change our lives today, in light of the future (*it's a gift*).
- F.** The best thing we can do in the present, is to be mindful of the future. Knowing where life is headed, causes us to change the way we are living in the present. This is why I'm going to talk about it tonight. Not because I care about trying to solve some future riddle. I'm not so much concerned about the riddle, as I do you living differently today and tomorrow, in light of what God says about the future.
- G.** This is why I study the end-times, because it forces us to hit rewind, and change the way we are living in the present. So, buckle up, breathe deeply, and let's look at God's Word together tonight.

### **II. THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA (Rev. 3:7-13)**

- A.** The city of Philadelphia was located 30 miles east, southeast of Sardis. It was originally established around 140 B.C. with the sole purpose of a being base from which the Greek language, its worldview, and way of life would spread to the known world (*they saw it as a mission city*).
- B.** The name of the city literally means 'Brotherly Love. William Penn who was born in Buckinghamshire copied the idea of this city when founding Pennsylvania, by naming an American City Philadelphia.
- C.** The devastating earthquake of 17 A.D. that greatly damaged Sardis also impacted Philadelphia. These earthquakes in the region were primarily caused by the large amount of volcanic activity taking place around them. This was a blessing and a curse. The blessing was that it created really fertile soil, but the negative was the vast amount of aftershocks that left the city terrified.

- D. From this soil, Philadelphia as a city was able to become an exporting city of wine. During a severe famine in 92 A.D. Domitian issued an edict that at least half of the cities vineyards be destroyed so that corn could be planted in its place, which was far more needed than wine. This had a massive impact financially on this city as no other place produced wine like Philadelphia.
- E. Alongside the wine, this city also exported pagan religions throughout the whole of Asia. Philadelphia was littered with so many temples they took on the name of 'little Athens', exporting two types of spirits.
- F. But regarding the Church in Philadelphia, Darrell Johnson rightly says, "*Can you sense Jesus' delight in the Church of Philadelphia? Can you sense His joy...This Church had not lost its first love...they remained loyal under pressure...they weren't tolerant of ideas contrary to the Gospel...they boldly confessed Jesus in the marketplace...which is more than you can say for 4 of the 5 previous Churches (Ephesus, Pergamos, Thyatira and Sardis).*" –Darrell Johnson, Discipleship On the Edge, Pg. 106

### III. THE CHURCH OF PHILADELPHIA

- A. **Revelation 3:7** *"And to the angel of the Church in Philadelphia write, these things says He who is holy, He who is true, He who has the key of David, He who opens, and no one shuts, and shuts and no one opens."*
  - 1. Jesus begins His ADDRESS to the Church of Philadelphia by encouraging a group of leaders that are serving both Him and others faithfully under great pressure and difficulty.
  - 2. To the Church of Philadelphia Jesus reveal's four distinct and very specific ATTRIBUTES of Himself. This is the largest number of attributes that Jesus shares with any of the seven Churches.
  - 3. These things says He who is holy = This phrase appears elsewhere in the Revelation speaking about God, but here Jesus is using it to speak of Himself. A better reading of this is, "*says the Holy One.*"
    - a. Jesus is reminding them about His costly obedience to the Father in order to strengthen them to remain faithful to Him. The One leading them was faithful to the Father as the Holy One of God.
  - 4. He who is true = Jesus is the real as opposed to the unreal. When we encounter Christ, we don't encounter a shadowy outline of truth, but Truth itself. Jesus' words can be trusted because He's not lying like those He mentions in verse 9.
    - a. To this weak, hard-pressed Church, His promises in verse 12 will seem too good to be true.
  - 5. He who has the key of David = As the Greater David, Jesus holds the key into David's house, the Messianic Kingdom. The Church was receiving push back from their Jewish brothers in the city that this Christ didn't have real authority to permit people into His kingdom.
    - a. **Revelation 22:16** *"...I am the Root and Offspring of David..."*
    - b. **Luke 2:31-33** *"And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call His name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David. And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever and of His kingdom there will be no end."* (2<sup>nd</sup> Samuel 7:16).

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- c. The key of David is a direct quote taken from **Isaiah 22:22** which spoke of the key being taken from Shebna and given to Eliakim. The one who had this key had access to the royal treasury of the House of David. Unlike Eliakim who only had access for a little while, Jesus would say I have access eternally.
- d. Jesus is saying to the Church, *“Listen to Me, I’m God’s Son, the truthful One, and I am the only One with access into house of David, not temporarily but eternally. Don’t listen to the ones around you, they are all liars and filled with falsehood. I alone am truthful. I alone am trustworthy.”*
1. Friends, our need for breakthrough isn’t conditional upon our circumstances being optimum. Breakthrough isn’t predicated on our situation turning around. Breakthrough is based solely on Christ. Don’t forget Jesus is the One with the keys!
  2. Beloved, don’t take the shut doors as His judgment upon you, or His disapproval of you, or His frustration in you. He’s got the keys!
6. He who opens and no one shuts, and shuts and no one opens = To a Church that was receiving closed doors of fellowship and friendship from their own countrymen, it would have been greatly encouraging that the One who is leading you is alone able to open and shut doors.
- B. Revelation 3:8** *“I know your works. See, I have set before you an open door, and no one can shut it; for you have a little strength, have kept My word, and have not denied My faith.”*
1. Jesus does something here He doesn’t do with any of the other Churches. He mentions knowing about their works but doesn’t elaborate on any of them. He seems to be mentioning the sterling way in which they were loving Him, being faithful to Him, and serving Him in the midst of difficulty.
    - a. A large percentage of the energy Church leadership spends is asking people to do things they should be doing already. What if that energy was spent extending the kingdom inside and outside the Church?
  2. I have set before you an open door, and no one can shut it = This open door that is set before the Church by Jesus is two-fold;
    - a. *It’s an open door of ministry, missions and kingdom opportunity.* We should spend less time talking about closed doors into hearts, Churches and nations and more time about the God who opens up closed doors. He’s the God of breakthrough (**1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 16:9; 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians 2:12; Colossians 4:3; Acts 14:27**).
    - b. *It’s an open door of intimacy into the heart of God.* There is a privileged place of intimacy that the saints on earth share with Jesus that the angels never experience (**1<sup>st</sup> Peter 4:12-14**).
1. **John 15:15** *“No longer do I call you servants, for a servant doesn’t know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I have heard from My Father I have made known to you.”*
  2. **1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 1:9-12** *“...eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man, the things which God has prepared for those that love Him. But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God. For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of God except the*

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*Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God.*

3. You have a little strength—Friends, there is something about being small, weak, and unseen by others that leaves us feeling that God feels the same way about us, that we feel about ourselves and our situations. When we feel small, when we feel neglected, we assume God feels the same way about us.
    - a. Friends, if there's three Churches among the 7 in **Revelation 2-3** from the outside, without knowing what's going on, on the inside that you'd want to be a part of, it's Ephesus, Sardis, and Laodicea. But these three Churches receive the worst rebuke from Jesus among the seven.
    - b. But, if there were two Churches that you, from the outside, wouldn't want to be a part of, it's Smyrna, and Philadelphia. But the cray cray thing is, these two Churches are the only two among the 7 who receive no negative words from Jesus.
    - c. Look, God doesn't evaluate our lives the same way that we do. We have to be careful that we don't project onto God how we feel about ourselves, because in doing so, we can miss our breakthrough.
  - C. **Revelation 3:9** *"Indeed I will make those of the synagogue of satan, who say they are Jews, but are not, but lie—indeed I will make them come and worship before your feet, and to know that I have loved you."*
    1. Smyrna and Philadelphia were experiencing similar pressures from their fellow Jewish brothers and sisters. And just like Smyrna, Philadelphia receives no **ACCUSATION** from Jesus.
    2. The synagogue of satan was a place where professing Jews were worshipping God and claiming to be the true Israel of God. Jesus is contrasting these Jews whom He calls liars with Himself who alone is true.
    3. Jesus is making clear that there is a coming day when the nation of Israel as a whole will see the Church (Jews and Gentiles) as something that God loves and gave Himself for.
    4. Today for devout Jews who don't love Jesus; His name (Jesus), His Church and the New Testament are a massive stumbling block (**Psalms 118:22-24**). But it won't be this way forever (**Zechariah 12-14**). The Lord has promised that the outpouring of the Holy Spirit (the fullness) will actually provoke Israel to Jealously (**Rom. 11:11-16**).
    5. The nation of Israel will one day celebrate a Gentile Church throughout the nations, as they have struggled to stay steady, preaching Christ faithfully and presenting the Gospel under intense pressure. God loves to publically vindicate those whom He loves (**Romans 9:1-5; Hebrews 11:32-40**).
      - a. This isn't about Gentiles gloating over Jews, this is about Gentiles loving and serving Jews, in the same way that they've served us.
  - D. **Revelation 3:10** *"Because you have kept My command to preserve, I also will keep you from the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth. Behold, I am coming quickly! Hold fast what you have, that on one may take your crown."*
    1. Jesus continues to give this Church the **ASSURANCE** that not only does He see them, that He will reward them, but that He is actually able to do what He says (*"...He who is true..."*)
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2. I also will keep you from the hour of trial which shall come upon the world, to test those who dwell on the earth  
= In recent years this verse has been used to speak about a pre-tribulation rapture. I personally don't believe it speaks of the rapture, but of God's ability to keep our lives in the midst of trouble, which is a post-tribulation viewpoint.
- a. Although I'm not trying to convince you to believe the same way that I do, I am going to challenge you to examine what you believe about Christ's return. This isn't a fringe subject, it's not a side discussion, and it's not without significant consequence.
  - b. The big question to be answered in this verse is, will the Church be kept by preservation THROUGH the Great-Tribulation, or a prior removal FROM the Great Tribulation. The idea is that it's an *emergence from*, a *coming out of*, being *kept through*, or *guarded during*.
  - c. The word used here for keep, Strong's #5083 and it means to set a *watch*, to *guard from loss or injury* or *keeping one's eye upon something* as opposed to escaping (#5442) something.
    1. **John 17:15,18** "I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one...As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world."
    2. **Jude 24** "Now to Him who is able to keep (guard you, keep close watch of you and guard against) you from stumbling, and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy..."
    3. **Jeremiah 30:7** "Alas! For that Day is great, there is none like it; and it's the time of Jacobs distress, but he will be saved from it." We might assume that God would keep Israel of Old from trouble also, but the reality is God sent them to exile in Babylon, and it's from Babylon that Israel emerged. Taken into exile, kept during, and saved out of, not from.
  - d. Protected from the wrath of God, but subject to the rage of satan, suffering and persecution, just like the Church has been throughout her history (*55 uses of the word tribulation in the New Testament*).
  - e. Well, people say, "*The word Church doesn't appear after Revelation 3, so the Church isn't involved in Revelation 4-19.*" The only problem with this, is that the word Church also doesn't appear in 6 other books of the New Testament (**2<sup>nd</sup> Timothy, Titus 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Peter, 2<sup>nd</sup> John and Jude**).
  - f. But here is what's mentioned after **Revelation 3**:
    1. "...and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb each having a harp and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints...I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the Word of God and for the testimony which they held...they should rest a little while longer, until both the number of their fellow servants and their brethren, who would be killed as they were, was completed...Do not harm the earth, the sea, or the trees till we have sealed the servants of God on their foreheads...I looked and behold a great multitude which no one could number of all nations, tribes, peoples and tongues, standing before the throne. So he said to me, These are the ones who came out of the great tribulation and washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb...And the dragon was enraged with the woman, and he went to make war with the rest of her offspring, who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ...It was granted to him (the antichrist) to make war with the saints and overcome them. And authority was given him over every tribe, tongue, and nation...He who leads into captivity shall go into captivity; he who kills with the sword shall be killed with the sword. Here is the faith and the patience of the saints...These are the ones who follow the Lamb wherever He goes. These were redeemed from among men, being first fruits to God and to the
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Lamb...Here is the patience of the saints; here are those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus...Write; blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on. "Yes" says the Spirit, "That they may rest from their labors, and their works follow them...And I saw something like a sea of glass mingled with fire, and those who have the victory over the beast, over his image and over the number of his name, standing on the sea of glass, having harps of God...Because You have judged these things. For they have shed the blood of saints and of prophets, and You have given them blood to drink...I saw the women, drunk with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus. And when I saw her, I marveled with great amazement...Rejoice over her, O heaven, and you holy apostles and prophets, for God has avenged you on her...And in her was found the blood of prophets and saints, and of all who were slain on the earth...Because He has judged the great harlot who corrupted the earth with her fornication; and He has avenged on her the blood of His servants shed by her...Then I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for their witness to Jesus and for the Word of God, who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received the mark on their foreheads or on their hands...I, Jesus, have sent My angel to testify to you these things in the Churches. I am the root and the offspring of David, the bright and morning star." **Revelation 5:8; 6:9, 11; 7:3, 9,14; 12:17; 13:7; 10; 14:4, 12, 13; 15:2; 16:5-6; 17:6; 18:20, 24; 19:2; 20:4; 22:16**

g. Jesus' intentions aren't to take them out of the present trouble or the big trouble at the end of this age, but to keep them through the midst of it. Our lives aren't to be tribulation free, but they are to be tribulation proof.

3. Behold, I am coming quickly! Hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown = Jesus' coming to Philadelphia wasn't of judgment but of deliverance. Every other time He says to a Church, "behold, I am coming quickly" it's speaking of judgment, but not here.

a. Though they have a crown today, they aren't guaranteed it tomorrow. They must hold fast!

**E. Revelation 3:12** "He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go out no more. 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 out of heaven from My God. And I will write on him My new name."

1. Jesus now gives the ASSURANCE that the love they have shown Him in this age will be rewarded eternally in the age which is yet to come.

2. The ruler of Philadelphia would enshrine outstanding citizens upon their death by dedicating a pillar to them and placing it somewhere significant inside the city. But Jesus is calling them to sow their treasures into heaven, and though they didn't make it on a pillar in a temporal city, He would enshrine them on a pillar in His eternal city.

a. The Holy Spirit would say, "let go of your earthly pillars, clothe yourself like a servant, lay aside your earthly robes, gird yourself with a towel and wash the feet of the lowly. I will remember, and reward you eternally."

3. I will write on them name of My God = This speaks of God's POSSESSION of the redeemed. Aaron the high priest wore on his forehead a golden plate that had these words engraved on it; "HOLY TO THE LORD" (**Exodus 28:36-38**). God's people are God's possession, and this is glorious.

a. **Revelation 13:16** "He causes all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and slave, to receive a mark on their right hand or on their foreheads..."

b. **Revelation 22:4** "They shall see His face, and His name shall be on their foreheads."

4. I will write on them the name of the city of My God, the New Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God = This speaks of our POSITION of authority in Christ, and the access we have into the eternal city both today and in the resurrection which is yet to come.
  - a. Some people are given the key of the city, or made the father of a city, but Jesus has placed us in a position of authority to receive access into His Father's eternal city, the New Jerusalem. Beloved, we aren't going away to heaven; heaven is coming to earth in the form of a city!

**F. Revelation 3:13** *"He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the Churches."*

1. To a faithful, overcoming people Jesus still issues the final APPEAL for them to hear closely what the Holy Spirit is saying to the Churches.