

7 Churches
The Unstoppable Church
Revelation 3:7-13

March 12, 2017

HDBC

Philadelphia: *The Unstoppable Church*

This morning we complete the series, **Seven Churches**. In Revelation 2-3 we have 7 letters sent to 7 churches that were in existence during the first century of Christianity. John, as an old man, was the last of the 12 apostles still living. All the others, according to tradition have been killed for their faith. Though he has not been martyred for his faith, John did not escape persecution.

He was exiled on the lonely island of Patmos for his faith. While there he received a vision from God that God was indeed still in control. God would bring an end to suffering and sin and would re-establish paradise. But that would happen at some point in the future. Now, 2000 years later, we are still waiting. But we do not wait in vain. We know He will one day come!

While we wait, He has given us clear instructions for how we are to live. In fact the entire Bible is a guide book for living. That includes the Revelation. In the book of Revelation there are specific instructions written to seven specific churches in John's day. The messages to those churches are also messages for us.

Just to remind you, we skipped number six and dealt with number seven a few weeks ago, in preparation for revival. Today we will look at number six, which is really number seven in the our series. The text is Revelation 3:7-13.

This the letter to the church at Philadelphia If I could give a name to this church it would be ***The Unstoppable Church***. Jesus revealed to this church that he would give them an open door which no one could close. In other words they would be unstoppable in carrying out the mission and purpose of God.

Let's read the text together. Rev. 3:7-13.

Five characteristics of this unstoppable church . . . centered in Christ.
If we want to be an unstoppable church, we need to embrace these five things centered in Christ. If you want to be an unstoppable Christian, embrace these five things centered in Christ. **Five things that were true of this church, related to Christ.**

1. Inspired by His Greatness (7)

As with all of the letters, Jesus begins with a description of Himself meant to inspire and motivate the readers of this letter. The descriptive words and phrases remind us of the greatness of Christ. Note three things that it says about Him.

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 will open. He is holy, he is true, and he is the one who controls the opening and closing of doors. From this statement know three things that are absolutely true about Jesus.

A. He will never defile

At his birth the angel described Jesus as ***the holy child***.

A terrified demon cried out, *I know who you are, the Holy One of God!*

Peter wrote, *We have believed and have come to know that you are the Holy One of God.*

Because he is holy, He will never defile those who are near to Him. The character of the people you hang with has a tendency to rub off on you. If you hang with bad people you are likely to become bad. If you hang with people who use profanity you are likely to do so. If you hang with braggarts you are likely to begin to brag.

You will never be defiled by drawing close to Jesus. In fact the closer you are to Jesus the more likely you are to be holy, for He is holy. You can never blame your sin on Jesus, for He cannot sin. If you want to be holy, even as He is holy, you need to draw near to Him in prayer, fellowship and in obedience.

B. He will never deceive

Because he is true, He will never deceive. He is, at the core of his nature, true. He can only operate in truth. He can never lie. Therefore, he will never deceive. Whatever He says you can trust. What He has said in His word, you can trust. Whenever He prompts you to go in a direction, you can know with certainty that He is not trying to trick you or deceive you.

When he speaks, He speaks truth. When He leads, He leads in the truth. When He brings words of comfort, He is doing so with the truth. People will sometimes deceive out of selfish motives. Not Jesus. People will sometimes deceive just for fun. Not Jesus. He operates exclusively in truth. We struggle to understand that because we live in a culture and world of deception and untruths. Not Jesus.

C. He will never be defeated

Because he has the *key of David and is able to open doors which no one can close and shut doors which no one can open*, he will never be defeated. I don't want to get too much into the weeds here, but I need to at least touch on what this phrase, *key of David* means.

It was through David that the Messiah would come. Jesus is declaring that He is the fulfilment of the O. T. prophesies about the coming Messiah through the lineage of David. One can hardly think of David without thinking of his connection to the promised Messiah.

Key of David - A key is something that locks and unlocks. It represents authority. This is confirmed with the added commentary. If Jesus opens a door and wants it to stay open, no one can shut it. If Jesus shuts a door and wants it to remain shut, no one can open it. In other words . . .

He will never be defeated. What He desires to do, He will do.

This church was unstoppable because they focused on the greatness of Jesus as reflected in his holiness, his truthfulness and his sovereign power.

2. Focused on His Mission (8)

Jesus had opened a door for this church. It was not a powerful church. In fact, he reminds them that they had only a little power. That could have been a little discouraging. But it was not. The success of the church would not be dependent upon their power, strength or ability. Yet, Jesus opened a door for them and promised that no one would be able to close that door. **Staff, missions, property, ministries.**

What is an open door? Open doors generally speak of opportunities provided by the Lord to accomplish His purposes. Open doors speak of **direction and focus**. Open doors speak of **purpose and mission**. Churches can go in any number of directions and be motivated by any number of things, some may even be good things.

This church was focused on the door which God opened, rather than on all the doors that individual members might selfishly choose. In other words, they were kingdom focused rather than inward focus. **What direction should a church go?**

They should go through the doors which God opens. When they do that they will be unstoppable. Churches get bogged down when they set their own agenda.

This church was . . . Inspired by His greatness, Focused on His mission.

3. Committed to His Word (8)

Jesus said, *yet you have kept my word.*

This church was committed to the word of God. To them it was not a book of suggestions, but an instruction book for living. They highly revered the Word, not simply as a **sacred book** but as relevant to the way they lived their lives and operated their church. **They not only believed it but that they obeyed it.**

This October the Christian world will celebrate the 500th anniversary of the beginning of the protestant reformation. On October 31, 1517, Martin Luther nailed to the church door at Wittenberg, 95 statements challenging the beliefs and practices of the Roman Catholic church. This was the opening shot fired in a theological battle that resulted in the protestant reformation.

Luther was a member of the RCC, but experienced a personal conversion from reading the Bible. The more he read it the more he saw just how corrupted the church was and just how lost he was. Reading the Bible led to His salvation.

He learned that salvation came by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. Salvation was not dependent upon the church, the sacraments, the priests. Salvation came through faith in Christ. The sacraments were powerless to save. The pope was powerless to save. The Bible was the ultimate authority.

The church tried to silence his message. In April 1521 he met with leaders of the Church who tried to force him to recant his faith. His answer?

Unless I am convicted by Scripture and plain reason, I do not accept the authority of popes and councils, for they have contradicted each other, my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and I will not recant anything, for to go against conscience is neither right nor safe. God help me. Amen.

Inspired by His greatness, Focused on His mission, Committed to His word.

4. Faithful to His Name (8)

And have not denied my name.

The context makes it clear that **even under the pressure of persecution**, they remained true. No matter what it costs them, they stayed true. We are not under the threat of persecution, but I wonder how quickly we deny his name when we think it will cost us? We often deny his name not by what we say but by what we don't say. Not by what we do, but by what we don't do.

Do you wear the mantle of being a Christ-follower openly and gladly? Or, do you prefer to fly under the radar and hope no one notices? We can deny his name in many ways. This church was willing to pay the price to wear that name.

Inspired by His greatness, Focused on His mission,
Committed to His word, Faithful to His Name

5. Encouraged by His Promises (9-13)

No time to deal with all the promises in detail, but I do want to mention them.

A. Promise of Vindication (9)

This church was **criticized, ridiculed and scorned** by the culture around them. They were viewed as **weird, weak and deceived**. But it will not always be that way. Jesus promised this church that he will one day make it clear to all of their critics that they really were right and that they really are loved by God.

Vindication can be a sweet thing, can't it? When you know you are right and others refuse to believe you, it can be very frustrating. But when vindication comes there is a sense of sweet satisfaction.

B. Promise of Preservation (10)

Jesus promises to take care of this church. It would take at least 15 minutes to look at all the possibility applications of this verse. It certainly sounds like he is referring to **the great tribulation** which will come at some point in the future. If that is the case, and I suspect it is, what does it mean?

Some will want this to support a pre-tribulation rapture perspective. Others will say that it supports a God-given endurance to make it through the tribulation. This text is not absolutely definitive. It doesn't matter. What does matter, is that Jesus promises to preserve these believers.

C. Promise of His Return (11)

Coming quickly. No time for laziness. This *coming of Christ* is different from that mentioned in the other letters. In some of the other letters he threatened to come in judgment or discipline. Here, the coming is a reference to His second coming.

Crown mentioned is the crown of reward, not of salvation. "Hold Fast" has the idea of "keeping a firm grip." Present imperative.

D. Promise of Heaven (12-13)

No time for details. Clear promise of Heaven. There is more beyond this life.

Personal Takeaways . . .

If we want to be an unstoppable church . . .

 If you want to be an unstoppable Christian . . .

We must . . .

Be inspired by His greatness, are you inspired by his greatness?

Focused on His mission, are you focused on His mission?

Be committed to His Word, are you committed to His word?

Be faithful to His name, are you faithful to His name?

Be encouraged by His promises, encouraged by His promises?