

Revelation 3:7-13 Responding to Jesus

A sermon delivered at Calvary Chapel DC Metro
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SUMMARY: Jesus is holy, true, and has all authority. The church in Philadelphia has simply responded to who Jesus is and what He has done, and now Jesus promises to take care of them forever.

We've been looking at seven letters sent by Jesus to seven churches in the Western side of what is now Turkey. Jesus gave each church a written evaluation of how they were doing and sent it to them by the hand of John, His famous disciple. We've noticed that the letters follow a common pattern – they open with Jesus saying something about Himself then move on to a commendation for things the church is doing right, followed by a correction for something that needs to be fixed, and finally they move on to a promise for those who overcome.

That's the general pattern. But not all the churches fit precisely. If you were here last week you remember we looked at the sad church in Sardis – Jesus had nothing good to say to them, they were the church in need of a desperate turn-around. Well, this morning, we see another church that breaks the mold, but this time for good reasons – we come to the church of Philadelphia, the church of brotherly love – and we discover Jesus has no corrections for them. All they get is encouragement for today and promises of what lies ahead. It's my hope that as we look at this letter we'll get a lot of encouragement ourselves. Read with me:

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”*’: 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 name. 9 Indeed I will make *those* of the synagogue of Satan, who say they are Jews and are not, but lie—indeed I will make them come and worship before your feet, and to know that I have loved you. 10 Because you have kept My command to persevere, 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. 11 Behold, I am coming quickly! Hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown. 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. 13 “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”’

Philadelphia really was the city's name, the city of brotherly love. It's the city that our Philadelphia is named after. So let's talk about love for a minute.

Those of you who know a little Greek know there are several words for love – *eros*, which is sensual love, the love of lovers; *storge* – the love between family, between children and parents, it's an affectionate love; *agape*, the love that is often used to speak of the love God has for us, it's an unconditional love; and then there is *philia* – the concept actually originates with Aristotle and it's a virtuous love – a love between equals, this is the love that man has for his friends, for those he goes to combat with, it is the love he has for his country.

It's the love that King Eumenes shared with his brother Attalus and it's why he named the city Philadelphia as a tribute. And now something of that same idea – loving, being committed to, focused on someone else, is being reflected in the church in Philadelphia – they're focused on Jesus, not themselves, and I would suggest to you that's one of the main reasons Jesus was so impressed.

I mean, did you notice, in this evaluation where Jesus gave no corrections, we don't find a long list of what *they've* done, there's really not much *about them* at all, except that they were fiercely loyal to Jesus – to His name and to His word – everything else is about who Jesus is and what He has done and will do for them. I think there's a message for us there. God's not looking, first and foremost, for you to do great things for Him, oh that will come, but the primary thing, the first thing, the main thing is – are you deeply connected to Him? Actions flow out of affections.

My wife doesn't love me because of all the things I do for her – she doesn't love me because I take her out on my yacht and sail to the Bahamas. She doesn't love me because of the enormous house we have, or because of the car I bought her. She doesn't love me because I take her out for nice dinners. She doesn't love me because I earned an award or promotion at work, or because anyone else knows my name. She loves me, at root, because of the relationship we have – the time we spend together, the values we share, the help and encouragement we provide to each other. She loves me, in part, because out of the other seven billion people on the planet, I choose to make a really big deal about her.

Friends, that's what God wants most out of you. You don't have to start some non-profit, or get elected to a certain office, you don't have to teach endlessly in Children's ministry or write some new worship song, you don't have to be some sort of perfect mom to four holy kids. That's not the way you get His approval. You *can* do all those things, they're not bad, but *first* He wants all those good works to spring out of a deep relationship with you. Actions flow out of affections. Are you clinging to His name and His word? That's what He's looking for. And as we go through this evaluation of the church in Philadelphia look at how it all plays out.

Let's start as we usually do by asking – what can we learn here about Jesus? And right off the bat we see three things: He is holy, He is true, and He has authority since He has the key to open and shut.

Let's take a look at those in order. First, He is holy – that's probably not a surprise to anyone, is it? The Bible often describes God as holy, and in a sense, we can say that only He is holy – He is the only one who isn't missing anything. He's the fulfillment and completion of everything you've ever wanted. God is perfect. There is nothing off or odd about Him. He never has a bad day or a makes a mistake.

As we move through the book of Revelation we will notice several times when everything in Heaven stops and all the angels and the saints worship God and they cry out "Holy, holy, holy." They praise God *because* He is holy – because it's inherent in His nature, He doesn't have to try, that's just who and what He is.

We praise people because of how they appear – a beautiful woman can often get her way, an individual with rank or position will experience the same – they receive better treatment on the basis of how they look or what they have. But they're not *inherently* worthy of praise. If they lost their beauty or their position, they would suddenly find themselves treated like everyone else, or worse. But again, it's not that way with God – He is inherently holy. He is the very definition of holy. He is good and evil does not compare to Him, it is simply the absence of Him.

He's also true – and just as there are several words for love in Greek, there are two different words for true. There is true, as in, the opposite of false. And while God is certainly true in that sense, He's not a liar; this word is actually the word for something that is true in the sense of being real, not fake. Jesus is saying, "I am the substance, and not a shadow." That was a very relevant statement in a time and place where there were hundreds of false gods and goddesses and temples. Jesus insists, He is the only true, or real, God.

The third thing we notice is that Jesus has authority - a fact that is symbolized by possessing the key of David. Now, when I sat down to study for this sermon I had to ask – how common were keys 2000 years ago? And I was a little surprised by what I learned. Locks and keys probably originated 4000 years ago – the oldest known example was found in modern Erbil, not far outside of Mosul in Iraq. Archaeologists have discovered ancient keys and locks all across the Middle East, Egypt, and the Far East. By the time of the Romans locksmiths were actually making keys small enough to be kept on your finger dangling from your ring so you could show off the fact that you had something worth locking up.

But whether you're rich or poor, important or average, we all understand that locks and keys are about access and control. Keys determine who gets what. You might have a key to your office, but do you have the "master key" which opens everyone's office? Keys, whether physical, digital, or electronic determine who gets in where.

It's no surprise then, that we see Jesus speaking often of keys, since He has all authority. Remember, Jesus told Peter He would give him the keys to the Kingdom of Heaven (Matthew 16). Back in Chapter One He tells John He has "the keys of Hades and of Death." And now, He says, I have the key of David.

David was the famous king of Israel, ruling at the height of Israel's glory. To have His key meant to control access to all of the royal treasuries – if you had the king's key, you had the master key, and had all access to everything. And that gave Jesus the ability to close and no one could open, and to open what no one would then be able to shut.

So, this is who Jesus is – holy, true, and in control. Which brings us to the church's commendation because, remember, all they really did is respond to what they knew about Jesus. They had “a little strength,” and with it they clung to Jesus' name and His Word. So, let's look at those things.

First off – they had “a little strength” – they weren't a flashy, big church like we saw in Sardis – remember the church there had a reputation – people knew about them. They were the church with the impressive architecture. Lots of people. They had funny or moving speakers. They used lots of video clips and had a great band. They seemed GREAT from the outside, but Jesus wasn't impressed. He said they were so busy keeping up with all the programs and PR that they were spiritually weak and dying on the inside.

Friends, what are you looking for in a church? Honestly, if you moved to the area and were looking for a new church, which would you be more likely to attend – the one that had a name, a reputation for itself, or the one that had “a little strength?” It would be pretty hard to tell right off the bat which one you should try out. But if you want to grow in your faith, if you want to know more about Christ and the Bible, you need to find the churches that are keeping His word and holding on to His name – and that might be a big church, all I want you to know is that the size of the ministry is no guarantee of it's true spiritual condition. Warren Wiersbe wrote, “It is not the size or the strength of a church that determines its ministry, but faith in the call and command of the Lord.”

You hear the same thing echoed in Scripture when God reminds us that His strength is made perfect in our weakness (2 Cor 12:9).

Martin Luther captured the idea in his famous hymn, A Mighty Fortress Is Our God:

Did we in our own strength confide,
Our striving would be losing.
Were not the right man on our side,
The man of God's own choosing.
Dost ask who that might be?
Christ Jesus it is He.
Lord Sabaoth His name,
From age to age the same
And He must win the battle.

God wants us to understand this important idea: that we don't have to be much our selves, as long as we make much of Him. Think of David and Goliath, right? You have this enormous giant challenging anyone in Israel's army to a one-on-one duel and no one wants

to take him on. But David, the youngest son in his family, is taking some supplies to his brothers in the army, and hears the giant taunting them. And he can't believe no one is going out to fight. He looks around at all the soldiers and asks: "[who is this uncircumcised Philistine, that he should defy the armies of the living God?](#)"

He's shocked that no one is taking Goliath on, so David said, I'll do it! So they took David to King Saul and David told him, ([1 Sam 17:34](#)) "[\[I\] used to keep \[my\] father's sheep, and when a lion or a bear came and took a lamb out of the flock, 35 I went out after it and struck it, and delivered *the lamb* from its mouth; and when it arose against me, I caught *it* by its beard, and struck and killed it. 36 \[I\] have killed both lion and bear; and this uncircumcised Philistine will be like one of them, **seeing he has defied the armies of the living God.**" 37 Moreover David said, "**The LORD, who delivered me from the paw of the lion and from the paw of the bear, He will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine.**" And Saul said to David, "Go, and the LORD be with you!"](#)

So David went out and grabbed five stones for his sling and the showdown began.

[41](#) So the Philistine came, and began drawing near to David, and the man who bore the shield *went* before him. [42](#) And when the Philistine looked about and saw David, he disdained him; for he was *only* a youth, ruddy and good-looking. [43](#) So the Philistine said to David, "[Am](#) I a dog, that you come to me with sticks?" And the Philistine cursed David by his gods. [44](#) And the Philistine said to David, "Come to me, and I will give your flesh to the birds of the air and the beasts of the field!" [45](#) Then David said to the Philistine, "You come to me with a sword, with a spear, and with a javelin. But I come to you in the name of the LORD of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. [46](#) This day the LORD will deliver you into my hand, and I will strike you and take your head from you. And this day I will give the carcasses of the camp of the Philistines to the birds of the air and the wild beasts of the earth, that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel. [47](#) Then all this assembly shall know that the LORD does not save with sword and spear; for the battle *is* the LORD's, and He will give you into our hands."

[48](#) So it was, when the Philistine arose and came and drew near to meet David, that David hurried and ran toward the army to meet the Philistine. [49](#) Then David put his hand in his bag and took out a stone; and he slung *it* and struck the Philistine in his forehead, so that the stone sank into his forehead, and he fell on his face to the earth. [50](#) So David prevailed over the Philistine with a sling and a stone, and struck the Philistine and killed him. But *there was* no sword in the hand of David. [51](#) Therefore David ran and stood over the Philistine, took his sword and drew it out of its sheath and killed him, and cut off his head with it.

And when the Philistines saw that their champion was dead, they fled. [52](#) Now the men of Israel and Judah arose and shouted, and pursued the Philistines as far as the entrance of the valley and to the gates of Ekron. And the wounded of the Philistines fell along the road to Shaaraim, even as far as Gath and Ekron. [53](#) Then the children of Israel returned from chasing the Philistines, and they plundered their tents.

[54](#) And David took the head of the Philistine and brought it to Jerusalem, but he put his armor in his tent.

55 When Saul saw David going out against the Philistine, he said to Abner, the commander of the army, "Abner, whose son *is* this youth?"
And Abner said, "As your soul lives, O king, I do not know."
56 So the king said, "Inquire whose son this young man *is*."
57 Then, as David returned from the slaughter of the Philistine, Abner took him and brought him before Saul with the head of the Philistine in his hand. 58 And Saul said to him, "Whose son *are* you, young man?"
So David answered, "*I am* the son of your servant Jesse the Bethlehemite."

Nobody knew who this guy was – all he had was "a little strength," but he knew God – his actions flowed out of his affections for God and His name – the name Goliath was mocking. David wasn't anything great on his own, but he kept God's word and held onto God's name at a time when no one else was.

Now, how does that happen? How do we lose our grip on God's Word? Well, people are surrendering it all time aren't they? We loose our grip on God's Word when it's inconvenient, when we don't like what it has to say. We loose our grip on God's Word when someone who sounds smart mocks it or suggests it can't be true in light of their latest 'discovery.' And right now, probably the biggest challenge is that people are losing their grip on God's Word because 'it hasn't kept up with the times,' especially in the area of sexual ethics. The world is trying to run along without God and they want you to do the same.

But the Bible clearly says it is "a lamp unto our feet and a light unto our path" (Ps 119:105) – why would you wander around in the darkness of this world without the light God wants to give? The Bible encourages us to (1 Tim 6:20) "Guard what was committed to your trust;" and "Hold fast the form of sound words" (2 Tim 1:13), to "earnestly contend for the faith" (Jude 3) and to "continue in the faith, grounded and steadfast," without being "moved away from the hope of the gospel which you heard," (Col 1:23).

The church in Philadelphia kept God's Word and, they did not deny Jesus' name and therefore Jesus was well pleased. In fact, based on their faithfulness, He was going to give them more opportunities. He was going to set before them an open door.

Philadelphia was actually settled as a missionary town to bring Greek culture to the surrounding regions, it's actually the easternmost of the seven cities – the farthest from Greece and Rome. In an effort to expand Greek, and later Roman, influence in the area, Philadelphia was intentionally built to export Greek ways of life as far as possible to the East. To reinforce that effort, it was linked with the roads serving the Imperial postal service. The Roman army often travelled through on their way to other places and so did merchants. Philadelphia was a hub city, much like us in DC. And now, *the church* in Philadelphia had a chance to export not Greek culture, but Christianity.

Folks, we have the same chance. People come here to get exposure, education, and experience, but let's give them Christ too. I want people to walk out of here looking back on their time in DC saying, "Man, God really used that place to grow me!" I want this to be the

place where you grew in Christ, the place you learned to worship and serve. The place you were baptized or the place you taught your first Bible lesson. I know you're busy. I know you've got a lot of things going on. But none of them is anywhere near as important, over the long haul – keeping eternity in mind – as what you do here for the Lord and His church. He's giving us, and He's giving you an open door here – what will you do with it? Are you going to walk through?

Jesus promised the church in Philadelphia that if they stayed focused on Him and the opportunity He was giving them, He would take care of the things that had opposed them and the things that were coming.

9 Indeed I will make those of the synagogue of Satan, who say they are Jews and are not, but lie—indeed I will make them come and worship before your feet, and to know that I have loved you.

Church, just because we have opportunities, just because there is an open door, that doesn't mean there won't be opposition. But God knows about the opposition, and He'll take care of it. It may last for a little while, but sooner or later, He's going to judge not just individuals or groups, but the entire world. And thankfully, that is something that those who trust in Christ will be spared from.

10 Because you have kept My command to persevere, 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.

We see here what many people think is a reference to the rapture of the church before the great tribulation – that before God sends this hour of trial upon the whole earth, He will suddenly evacuate all the faithful believers. We'll look into that idea more as we move through Revelation, but I want to point it out to you here when it comes up.

No one knows when this judgment, or the rapture, is going to happen, so what should we do until then? Well - the answer is to keep on keeping on. You've been holding on to God's word, keep it up:

11 Behold, I am coming quickly! Hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown. 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.

Christian God has a place for you in His presence and He's going to put some holy graffiti all over you. If you're trusting in Him now, He's going to keep you forever, and He'll prove to you that the song we sing is true – 'better is one day in your courts, than thousands elsewhere.'

We've seen this morning that Jesus is holy, true, and He has all authority. So be on the lookout in your life. Ask, "Where are the doors that God is opening, that no one can shut?" Look for the doors He has already opened, but also be on the lookout for brand-new doors – doors that are getting ready to open or have just opened. Where are the new and upcoming opportunities that God wants to bring your way, or bring our way as a church? What is God calling you to do, or to keep doing, or to do next?

You'll know, and you'll know with a deep sense of certainty, if you simply keep His word and don't deny His name. Do those things, and even if all you have is a little strength, you'll be pleasing to the God who made you and saved you. Let your actions flow out of your affections and you might just slay a giant.

Let's pray.