

The Son of Man's Message To The Church In Philadelphia

(Revelation 3:7-13 NASB) “And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write: He who is holy, who is true, who has the key of David, who opens and no one will shut, and who shuts and no one opens, says this: 8 ‘I know your deeds. Behold, I have put before you an open door which no one can shut, because you have a little power, and have followed My word, and have not denied My name. 9 Behold, I will make those of the synagogue of Satan, who say that they are Jews and are not, but lie—I will make them come and bow down before your feet, and make them know that I have loved you. 10 Because you have kept My word of perseverance, I also will keep you from the hour of the testing, that hour which is about to come upon the whole world, to test those who live on the earth. 11 I am coming quickly; hold firmly to what you have, so that no one will take your crown. 12 The one who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he will not go out from it anymore; 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 out of heaven from My God, and My new name. 13 The one who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.’

I. Cultural Context of the Church in Philadelphia



- a. Philadelphia was the smallest city of the 7 cities that Jesus addressed a letter to. It was named for Attalus II Philadelphus (Attalid king of Pergamum from 159-138 B.C.), whose loyalty for his brother, Eumenes II Soter (who preceded him as king), earned him the nickname “*Philadelphus*”. The two Greek words that make up “*Philadelphus*” are translated to mean “*brotherly love*”.
- b. Philadelphia had a fertile agricultural environment due to the volcanic soil upon which it sat, but was also known to have many earthquakes. In 17 A.D. a devastating earthquake destroyed the city of Sardis and much of Philadelphia causing many to leave the area, and those who stayed experienced extreme economic pressure. The devastation was so bad, that Emperor Tiberius canceled the tribute owed to Rome for a period of 5 years for Philadelphians.
- c. Philadelphia had soil very favorable for the cultivation of grapes to make wine and these vineyards functioned as the backbone for the Philadelphia’s economy. In 92 A.D. (just a few years before Revelation was written) The Emperor Domitian ordered the conversion of 75% of grapevines to be uprooted and converted to grainfields to help with grain shortages (The grainfields never produced).
- d. Alongside Smyrna, the Philadelphians church was the only other church to not get corrected by Jesus in His letter to them.

II. The Specific Revelation of Jesus to the Church in Philadelphia

(Revelation 3:7 NASB) “And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write: He who is holy, who is true, who has the key of David, who opens and no one will shut, and who shuts and no one opens, says this...”

- a. **He who is Holy** – God is entirely transcendent and set apart, He is set apart and superior to all (*Leviticus 19:1-2; 1 Samuel 2:2; Isaiah 6:1-5; 57:15*). As He is Holy, we are called to be like Him, it's the reason He reveals His holiness to us.

(1 Peter 1:14-16 NASB) “As obedient children, do not be conformed to the former lusts which were yours in your ignorance, 15 but like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all your behavior; 16 because it is written: “You shall be holy, for I am holy.”

- b. **Who is true** – Jesus is true to who He says He is. He is true, meaning His nature is in opposition to what is imperfect, defective, frail, and uncertain. This was such a relevant revelation to a community who was facing uncertain and frail times.

(John 3:33-35 NASB) “The one who has accepted His testimony has certified that God is true. 34 For He whom God sent speaks the words of God; for He does not give the Spirit sparingly. 35 The Father loves the Son and has entrusted all things to His hand. 36 The one who believes in the Son has eternal life; but the one who does not obey the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him.”

- c. **Who has the key of David, who opens and no one will shut, and who shuts and no one opens** – Jesus pulls on an old testament reference to speak into the tension between Jews and Christians that was taking place. Often, Jews would denounce Christians and accuse them of being “usurpers” of what God promised them. But here, Jesus makes clear that He is the One who “has the key of David...” and rests it on those who know Him and persist in faithfulness.

(Isaiah 22:22 NASB) “Then I will put the key of the house of David on his shoulder; When he opens, no one will shut, When he shuts, no one will open.”

(Matthew 16:19 NASB) “I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven.”

- i. The key of David is a reference to the Davidic covenant, which points to the reality that it unlocks the authority and resources of Jesus' Eternal Kingdom. This means Jesus is willing to open to us, right now, doors (that no one can shut) into His eternal authority and resources through governmental intercession.
- ii. Understanding David's government (and ultimately Jesus' Millennial governmental reign) can not be divorced from the importance that day and night worship played. Continual adoration was a vital reality in David's government (and will be in Jesus' Millennial Kingdom). It was also the source of Israel's prosperity and military victory. The “key of the house of David” is more than just a reference to the power of God's kingdom, but also includes the dynamics of His kingdom functions, including continual worship and prayer.

III. Affirmation & Recognition of the Church in Smyrna

(Revelation 3:8-10 NASB) “I know your deeds. Behold, I have put before you an open door which no one can shut, because you have a little power, and have followed My word, and have not denied My name. 9 Behold, I will make those of the synagogue of Satan, who say that they are Jews and are not, but lie—I will make them come and bow down before your feet, and make them know that I have loved you. 10 Because you have kept My word of perseverance, I also will keep you from the hour of the testing, that hour which is about to come upon the whole world, to test those who live on the earth.”

- a. **I know your deeds** – Like He did to many of the other churches, Jesus begins His letter by letting the Philadelphian church know He was intimately acquainted with all that they did. This is a reminder to us that our labors related to the assignment we've been given do not go unnoticed by Jesus.

- b. ***I have put before you an open door which no one can shut*** – Jesus, the One who holds the key of David, had opened up a door for this small and (seemingly) weak church that could not be shut by any person or principality. This “*open door*” could include:
 - i. The ability to effectively advance gospel centered labors (***Acts 14:27; 1 Corinthians 16:9; 2 Corinthians 2:12; Colossians 4:3; 2 Thessalonians 3:1-5***). The surrounding context (***Revelation 3:9***) suggests it could be effective ministry to those who He referred to as “*The Synagogue of Satan*”.
 - ii. The privilege of access to the resources, power, and authority of His Kingdom
 - iii. An open door that provides safety in the “*hour of testing*” (***Revelation 3:10***).
- c. ***Because you have little power, and have followed My word, and have not denied My name*** – This is the reason God opened up a door for them. The way “*power* (Greek *dynamis*) ” is used here points to the type of power and resources arising from the strength of numbers. Simply put, Philadelphia had a small church with little resources, yet they stayed true to His Word and did not deny His name in light of their smallness and in the face of pressure from their cultural context.
- d. ***Synagogue of Satan*** - Jews who went to synagogue in the Roman Empire had an exemption from participating in the temple sacrifices to the Emperor. This commonly led to non-Jews opening “*synagogues*” so that they would be the exempt from emperor worship. These ones who “*said that they are Jews but were not*”, (among other things) accused believers of being cannibalistic (eating his flesh and drinking his blood) resulting in Christians being ostracized from society.
- e. ***I will make them come and bow down before your feet, and make them know that I have loved you*** – Jesus was committed to validating and vindicating the faithful believers in the Philadelphian church. Jesus was going to use their faithfulness to bring those who slandered them to a point of humility (***Isaiah 45:14; 49:23; 60:14***) and perhaps, even salvation.
- f. ***Because you have kept My word of perseverance, I also will keep you from the hour of the testing, that hour which is about to come upon the whole world, to test those who live on the earth*** – This phrase points to the hour of Great Tribulation that takes place before the return of Jesus (*The events of this final 3 ½ year period are described throughout the book of Revelation*). The key here is because the Philadelphian kept His word and persevered, He intended to “***keep them from***” (preserve in the midst of) the hour of testing. The only other time the phrase “*keep you from*” is used in scripture is in ***John 17:15***, where Jesus prays that believers would not be taken out of the world but would persevere in righteousness despite the temptation of the evil one and of culture.

(John 17:15-18 NASB) “I am not asking You to take them out of the world, but to keep them away from the evil one. 16 They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. 17 Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth. 18 Just as You sent Me into the world, I also sent them into the world. 19 And for their sakes I sanctify Myself, so that they themselves also may be sanctified in truth.”

IV. Jesus call to Respond

(Revelation 3:11 NASB) “I am coming quickly; hold firmly to what you have, so that no one will take your crown”

- a. Jesus spoke with urgency to the church by saying, “*I am coming quickly*”. He called this small church to “*hold firmly to what they have*” which was, their ability to endure and persevere in righteousness despite their lack of strength and resource. Our ability to persist in holiness and stay faithful to our assignment is not found in the wealth of our resource, but the strength of our commitment to Him in light of His coming.

(1 Peter 4:7 NASB) “The end of all things is near; therefore, be of sound judgment and sober spirit for the purpose of prayer.”

- b. Jesus called this small church to faithfulness so that their crown, which represents victorious, royal authority, would not be taken away. The glory of our victories related to righteousness and wholeheartedness can be robbed, if we don’t hold firmly to a devoted lifestyle.

V. The Overcomers Promise

(Revelation 3:12-13 NASB) “The one who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he will not go out from it anymore; 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 out of heaven from My God, and My new name. 13 The one who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”

- a. This call to overcome smallness, weakness, pressure from the deceiver, and to remain faithful and persistent in righteousness is a relevant call for all believers today. In our American context, it’s easy associate “*success*” to certain metrics, rather than by what is happening at the heart level. If we overcome, God promised to make us pillars in His house, and the ability wear His reputation!
- b. ***A pillar in the temple of My God, and he will not go out from it anymore*** – The overcomer will have a permanent and unshakable place in the temple of God. Pillars are what give a building stability and security. These pillars speak to the indestructible nature of God’s Temple (house of prayer). God is using us as “*living stones*” to build His unshakeable and eternal house of prayer.

(1 Peter 2:5 NASB) “You also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices that are acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.”

(Ephesians 2:19-22 NASB) “So then you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God’s household, 20 having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the cornerstone, 21 in whom the whole building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord, 22 in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit.”

- c. ***I will write on him the name of My God, and the name of the city of My god, the new Jerusalem..., and My new name*** – In Kingdom dynamics, names function as more than just basic identifiers, but speak to the identity, reputation, and function of somebody. If we overcome, we get to wear the reputation of God the Father and His eternal city. We will be forever marked with the glory of the Father and the power and authority of His Kingdom. Overcomers will also be marked by Jesus’ “*new name*”, which speaks to His yet to be fulfilled millennial role as Victorious King of Kings on the throne of David.

(Revelation 22:12 NASB) “Behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to reward each one as his work deserves”