

## THE LETTER TO THE CHURCH IN PHILADELPHIA, REVELATION 3:7-13

Well let's turn in our Bibles, please, to the book of Revelation chapter 3. We're going to be looking together today at verses 7 to 13. Notice Revelation 3:7:

“<sup>7</sup> And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write; These things saith he that is holy, he that is true, he that hath the key of David, he that openeth, and no man shutteth; and shutteth, and no man openeth; <sup>8</sup> I know thy works: behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it: for thou hast a little strength, and hast kept my word, and hast not denied my name. <sup>9</sup> Behold, I will make them of the synagogue of Satan, which say they are Jews, and are not, but do lie; behold, I will make them to come and worship before thy feet, and to know that I have loved thee. <sup>10</sup> Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth. <sup>11</sup> Behold, I come quickly: hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown. <sup>12</sup> Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out: and I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, which is new Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from my God: and I will write upon him my new name. <sup>13</sup> He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.”

Now this is the sixth letter that Jesus is sending to the churches of Asia. This church at Philadelphia possesses a distinctive trait that is shared only with the church at Smyrna, and that is that Christ has no criticism or correction to offer to this church. Here is a church that is obedient to Christ in every area of its teaching and its practice. Like the church at Smyrna, it has been faithful in observing all that Christ has commanded them. You often hear people say, Well, there's no perfect church. And if by that they mean there are no churches with sinless people in them, then of course they are correct. But if by that they mean there are no churches that do not displease Christ in some way, then they are wrong.

By living according to all the instructions given to the church by Christ, both in doctrine and in practice, a church may very well be the perfect church—perfect in the sense that there is no defect in doctrine or defect in practice that needs to be corrected. Two out of these seven churches had achieved this status of being perfect churches. They were obeying Christ to the degree that they were blameless before Him. He had no blame and no correction to offer them at all. And His message to them was simply this: You are doing fine. Stay the course. Keep being faithful. I am with you, I will reward you. Just keep doing what you've been doing.

Now that's the kind of church that I want to be a part of, and that's the kind of church that I hope that we have. It's the kind of church that we *can* have if both pastor and people together fear God and love God and live for God and strive to follow every instruction Christ gives to His church in His word. Paul says to Timothy, the pastor of the church in Ephesus, in First Timothy 3 and verses 14 and 15: These things write I unto you, so that you may know how you *must* behave yourself in the church of the living God.

So having a blameless church is not hard. It is not some mysterious process. Having a blameless church consists in simply obeying the written word of God and the instructions it contains for what the church teaches and how the church functions.

But of course, the problem with that is that people want to do church their own way. They want to innovate. They want to try new things. They want to have new forms of worship and new practices and new teachings and new ministries and new doctrines. Not satisfied to just keep on doing what Christ has instructed them to do in the Bible, they have to implement what they perceive to be improvements so as to keep the people happy, and so as to keep them coming. This attitude of innovation instead of obedience is the start of every kind of error in practice and every kind of error in teaching.

The good news is that the church at Philadelphia, like the church at Smyrna, did not succumb to the voices that called them to depart from the biblical pattern of how their church should function and what their church should teach. As a result, this is a church that was blameless before Christ. Not only were they blameless before Christ, they were also warmly commended by Christ and given great encouragement by Christ. They were, if you will, the perfect church.

Well let us then consider together this blameless church, and seek to learn from this example how we, too, can be blameless as a church as well. In the first place then this morning, let us consider together the introduction of the letter to Philadelphia. The introduction to the letter is in verse 7. Notice verse 7: “And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write; These things saith he that is holy, he that is true, he that hath the key of David, he that openeth, and no man shutteth; and shutteth, and no man openeth.”

The introduction to this letter reveals to us both the recipient of the letter and also the author of the letter. Notice first of all the recipient of the letter. The recipient of the letter is the pastor and the church at the city of Philadelphia. The city of Philadelphia was located at the crossroads of three major provinces: Mysia, Lydia, and Phrygia. Like St. Louis in the United States is called the Gateway to the West, Philadelphia was known as the Gateway to the East.

The city was founded by Attalus II, whose renowned loyalty to his brother Eumenes earned him the title “Philadelphos,” or translated, “brotherlover,” or “lover of his brother.” So the city was founded by Attalus II, Philadelphos. That was his name: Attalus II, Philadelphos; Attalus II, Brotherlover. The city derived its name from its founder, and thus it was called Philadelphia, the City of Brotherly Love. Attalus intended for this city to be a base from which Greek culture and Greek values and the Greek way of life would be propagated and spread to the rest of the nation. Philadelphia was meant to be a missionary base for the spreading of Hellenistic culture and the Hellenistic way of life.

So from the beginning, this was supposed to be a missionary city, albeit, for Greek culture, and in that respect it was quite successful in achieving its goals. It is often said that Rome conquered

Greece militarily, and Greece conquered Rome culturally. And thus, what is the New Testament written in? Greek, because Greek, not Latin, was the *lingua franca* of the Roman world.

While the church at Philadelphia was apparently quite small—verse 8 says they had a little strength—the smallness and the weakness of the church did not keep them from being obedient to Christ or being pleasing to Christ. Now we must understand this point very clearly.

Notice verse 8. He says, “I know thy works: behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it:”—here it is—“for thou hast a little strength.” And what this means is that they were small and that they were poor. They weren’t a big strong church. They were a small church, a poor church, and thus a weak church. But we have to understand that it is not the size of the church, but rather, it’s the quality of the church that matters to Christ. Jesus did not say, “Oh! You’re a small church. You do not have strength and numbers. Shame on you! There must be something wrong with the way you people do church, because it’s so small and weak.” Well, that’s how people reason, isn’t it? But that’s not how Christ reasons.

Like a diamond, this church was very small in size, but it was highly prized by Christ and it was greatly valued by Christ. It was small, it was poor, but Christ was exceedingly pleased with it and gave it His warmest commendation, and criticized it in no way for being small and poor. You recall that Jesus Himself said in the gospel, in Matthew 18 and verse 20: “For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.” So it wasn’t the size of the church, it was the quality of the church that Christ was concerned with. It wasn’t how many people they had, it’s how faithful they were, that mattered to Jesus Christ.

Well this church had a great deal in common with the church in Smyrna, as we have said. Like Smyrna, it was blameless in the eyes of Christ. Like Smyrna, its enemies came from outside the church, not from inside the church. And like Smyrna, both churches were persecuted by Jews, of whom Jesus said that they served in a synagogue of Satan. So then, what we have here as the recipient of this letter is a small church, a poor church, but a blameless church—one that is persecuted by the world, but one that is greatly beloved by Christ. Well that, then, is the recipient of the letter.

Having seen the recipient of the letter, notice secondly, the author of the letter. The author of the letter is Jesus Christ, who identifies Himself with the most extended description of Himself that is given in any of these seven letters. Did you notice how lengthy His description of Himself was in verse 7? He says, “These things saith he that is holy, he that is true, he that hath the key of David, he that openeth, and no man shutteth; and shutteth, and no man openeth.” None of the other letters has that lengthy a description of the author of the letter.

Notice, then, that He identifies Himself as “he that is holy.” Holiness, of course, refers to Christ’s spotless purity and His sinless character. As the Scripture says in First John 3 and verse 5, “He was manifested to take away our sins; and in him is no sin.” But when He identifies Himself as being holy, this not only refers to His spotless purity and His sinless character, it also

is a reference to His Deity. Jehovah of the Old Testament is called “the Holy One,” in Isaiah 40 and verse 25, and in Habakkuk 3 and verse 3, as well as in many other passages too numerous to mention in both in the Old Testament and in the New Testament. As it says in Isaiah 6 and verse 3, “Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory.”

So when Jesus says in verse 7, “These things saith he that is holy,” what He is saying is, Not only do I have spotless purity and sinless character, I am also God. I am taking the title of “the Holy One” to myself, a title which belongs to God Himself in the Old Testament.

He not only identifies Himself as He who is holy, secondly, He identifies Himself as he that is true. Now we’ve already seen back in Revelation chapter 1 and verse 5, that Jesus Christ is identified as He “who is the faithful witness.” We spent a good deal of time talking about the fact that Jesus was a witness who always told the truth. So when Jesus says of Himself that He is the one who is true, He is declaring that His word is completely reliable, it’s wholly accurate, and it’s absolutely trustworthy. So when He speaks, there is no doubt that what He says is nothing but the truth. It’s always the truth, it’s only the truth, it’s ever the truth.

Now it’s interesting to note that these two terms “holy” and “true” are used as the title and name of God Himself a couple of chapters later in Revelation. Notice Revelation 6, verses 9 and 10: “<sup>9</sup> And when he had opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of them that were slain for the word of God, and for the testimony which they held: <sup>10</sup> and they cried with a loud voice, saying, How long, O Lord,”—notice the title—“holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?”

So here the souls that are in heaven are saying to the God of heaven, How long is it going to be before you get vengeance on those who slaughtered us? And when they addressed the God of heaven, they call Him the one who is holy and true. And notice what Jesus says about Himself in Revelation 3, verse 7: “These things saith he that is holy, he that is true.”

So Jesus is not only *truthful*, but Jesus is also the true Messiah. He is the promised Messiah of the Old Testament. He is the true Messiah, not a false one. The Jews, of course, said that Jesus was a false messiah, but they were liars. Notice in verse 9, Jesus says of them, They “do lie.” So Jesus is in fact the true One, the true Messiah. He tells the truth, and He is the true Messiah.

Then thirdly, He says of Himself that not only is He holy, not only is He true, but He says He has the key of David. You know what keys are for, right? They’re to open doors, correct? They’re to open locks. Now David of course was the king of Israel, and as king, he had complete authority over the kingdom to do as he saw fit. So Jesus, as the Son of David who sits on David’s throne in fulfillment of the Davidic covenant, has all authority given to Him in heaven and in earth. He is the greater antitype of which David was the foreshadowing.

In this sense, Jesus has the key of David; that is, He has the key of authority to open and shut the kingdom to whomever He wills, and He has the key of authority to open and close men’s minds

and men's hearts and men's understanding as He sees fit. If Jesus opens someone's eyes and heart to the gospel, no one can close their heart and mind to it, no matter how hard they try. And if Jesus closes a person's eyes and heart to the gospel, no one can open them, no matter what efforts they make.

In Job chapter 12, verses 13 and 14, it says of God: <sup>13</sup> "With him is wisdom and strength, he hath counsel and understanding. <sup>14</sup> Behold, he breaketh down, and it cannot be built again: he shutteth up a man, and there can be no opening." The kingdom of God is not run by the will of man. Jesus acts and no one can hinder His actions, whether they go in one direction or whether they go in the opposite direction. If He opens, no one can shut, and if he shuts, no one can open. People do not run the kingdom; He makes the decisions about what happens and how things turn out. He does according to His will in the armies of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth, and no one can stay His hand or say to Him, What doest thou?

So Christ opens and shuts the hearts of men. Christ opens and shuts the kingdom to men. Christ opens and shuts heaven to men. And Christ opens and shuts the New Jerusalem to men. Jesus has the keys to the kingdom, and He opens and He shuts as He pleases. He opens and shuts that kingdom as He pleases.

Now you recall back in chapter 1 and verse 18, Jesus said, "I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have"—what?—"the keys of hell and of death." So here, the keys of hell and death are further expanded, explained, and identified as being the key of David.

Because Jesus has the key of David, we must seek the permission and the help of Jesus before we make any attempt to accomplish anything in the lives of people. Jesus alone controls the results, and to try to do the work without His keys is to labor in futility. But if He opens the doors before us, then nothing and no one can defeat our labor for Him. His doors of providence open and they shut, and we must be sensitive to that and take heed to that and humbly bow before His choices of the doors He opens and the doors He shuts. Look for the doors Jesus is opening, go through them, and do not chafe against the closed doors, and rage against them.

I want us to look at two passages about this opening and shutting. First, Matthew chapter 13, Jesus is speaking to the crowds in parables. Notice verse 10: "And the disciples came, and said unto him, Why speakest thou unto them in parables?" Why are you using this teaching technique? Why don't you just say it out plain and straight? Here's the answer, verse 11: "He answered and said unto them, Because it is *given* unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not *given*." He says, I am opening the door of understanding to you, and I am shutting the door of understanding to them. You might not like that, but that's exactly what He's saying. Christ decides who hears His message and who doesn't.

Now He has some further things to say, which I'll read. Verse 12: "For whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance: but whosoever hath not, from him shall be

taken away even that he hath. <sup>13</sup> Therefore speak I to them in parables: because they seeing see not; and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand. <sup>14</sup> And in them is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah, which saith, By hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and shall not perceive: <sup>15</sup> for this people's heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them. <sup>16</sup> But blessed are your eyes, for they see: and your ears, for they hear."

So Jesus is not just acting arbitrarily here in opening and shutting people's eyes and ears to the truth of the gospel. Those who have their eyes and their ears opened or shut bear responsibility, and He identifies that responsibility by the way in which they respond. What Jesus is saying in verse 11 is, I have opened and I have shut, and that's why I'm teaching the way I'm teaching—to achieve that goal of opening and closing.

Secondly, want you to turn to Isaiah chapter 22. We're going to be looking together at verses 20 to 23. It says: "<sup>20</sup> And it shall come to pass in that day, that I will call my servant Eliakim the son of Hilkiyah: <sup>21</sup> and I will clothe him with thy robe, and strengthen him with thy [belt], and I will commit thy government into his hand: and he shall be a father to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and to the house of Judah." Now here it is, verse 22: "<sup>22</sup> And the key of the house of David will I lay upon his shoulder; so he shall open, and none shall shut; and he shall shut, and none shall open. <sup>23</sup> And I will fasten him as a nail in a sure place; and he shall be for a glorious throne to his father's house."

You'll notice that verse 22 says of Eliakim what Revelation 3 and verse 7 says about the Lord Jesus Christ. Now who was Eliakim? Well, Eliakim was the son of Hilkiyah the priest, and Eliakim, if you read about him in the rest of the Scriptures, was King Hezekiah's steward over his whole house. So King Hezekiah had a steward, and it was this Eliakim that's mentioned here. And as King Hezekiah's steward over his house, Eliakim had the power to either admit or deny entrance of people into the king's palace. If someone wanted to come into the king's palace, Eliakim had the key of authority to open that door and say, Sure, come on in and see the king; or, No, you are not coming in to see the king. The door is shut.

Eliakim is a prophetic type of the Lord Jesus Christ, and in the same way that Eliakim could open and shut David's house, Jesus can open and shut God's house—the New Jerusalem, the Kingdom of God. Jesus decides who is admitted and who is excluded. So Jesus has the power to open and close men's eyes and hearts, and Jesus has the power to open and close the Kingdom of God and the heaven of God, as well.

This, then, is the author of the letter. One who is holy, one who is true, and one who has the keys of David, who could open and no one can shut, and who can shut, and no one can open.

That brings us to our second major point. Having seen the introduction of the letter to Philadelphia, notice in the second place, the message of the letter to Philadelphia. This is in

verses 8 through 11. The message of this letter is an extended commendation and encouragement of this church, followed by a gentle warning of the need to keep up the good behavior that they had been exhibiting up to this point in time.

Notice then first of all, His commendation. He says to them in verse 8 of Revelation chapter 3, “I know”—the same thing He says to every one of these churches—“I know.” This awareness that Christ cares enough about each of His churches to know all about every one of His churches, helps us to see the value Christ places on His churches.

Now in life, a man pays attention to that which he cares about. He knows all about that which he sees as valuable and important to him. You have stuff in your possession, don’t you? And some of it you know in exact detail, you know all about it. Others of it, you haven’t thought about in 15 years. It’s out in the shed somewhere covered with cobwebs, and you probably don’t even know where it is. And digging through the shed, you may find something and say, Oh! I’d forgotten I had that! Right? But another thing, you know exactly where it is, you know exactly what it does, you know what it cost, you know when you used it last. You know all about it, because why? That thing’s really important to you.

So Christ is telling us that His churches, each of them, are the special focus of His attention, and He sees them as exceedingly valuable and exceedingly important to Him, because He laid down His life for them, and He will not neglect that for which He paid so dearly. And I am reminded of the words of Psalm 139, verses 1 to 6, where the Bible says: “O Lord, thou hast searched me, and known me. <sup>2</sup> Thou knowest my downsitting and mine uprising, thou understandest my thought afar off. <sup>3</sup> Thou compassest my path and my lying down, and art acquainted with all my ways. <sup>4</sup> For there is not a word in my tongue, but, lo, O Lord, thou knowest it altogether. <sup>5</sup> Thou hast beset me behind and before, and laid thine hand upon me. <sup>6</sup> Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot attain unto it.”

What the Psalmist is saying is, God, I am stunned at the degree of knowledge you have of me, in the most intimate details and in the most comprehensive fashion, in every area of my life, from front to back, from top to bottom, from side to side. I’m completely surrounded by the perfection of your knowledge of who I am. Why would you even pay attention to me and know me to this degree? And it’s a declaration of the value that Christ places on His people, that He knows all about them, that He pays that much attention to them.

It’s amazing that Christ would take this kind of interest in us and take this kind of notice of us, and yet He does. And now He says to the church at Philadelphia, “I know thy works.” I know your faithful obedience over the long haul. I know the patient perseverance you have exercised in following me. But, church, I have further work for you to do, and I will be with you in that work, and I will ensure the success of that work. He says in verse 8, “I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it.” Christ is going to go ahead of them, and Christ is going to open doors for them in the work that He has for them to do in the immediate future.

Paul says in Second Corinthians chapter 2, verse 12: “Furthermore, when I came to Troas to preach Christ’s gospel, and a door was opened unto me of the Lord.” Isn’t that amazing? And you remember when Paul was at Philippi and he preached the gospel there to Lydia, the seller of purple, it says, “whose heart the Lord opened.”

The point is, Christ is telling His church at Philadelphia that He’s going to open doors of opportunity to advance the gospel in the lives of people around them. He’s got missionary work for them to do, and He says, I’m going to go ahead of you and I’m going to open the doors of Providence and I’m going to open the doors of people’s hearts, because I’m opening the doors of heaven for them to come in through your ministry. I have the keys to all of those doors.

So Christ is going to open the door of men’s hearts and minds to be able to understand and receive the gospel. He’s going to open the doors of opportunity to advance the gospel in the lives of the people around them. He’s going to open the door of the Kingdom of God and allow those whom they invite to enter in to that kingdom.

Now you recall in my introduction, I said that the city of Philadelphia was supposed to be a missionary base for the spreading of Greek culture? Well Jesus says the church at Philadelphia is going to be a missionary base for the spreading the gospel. Jesus understands that the church is small and Jesus understands that the church is poor. He says in verse 8, “I know [that] thou hast a little strength.” In other words, this is not a strong church, in terms of resources. In themselves, they could never achieve what He has planned for them. But with Jesus going before them, and Jesus opening up doors for them, there is no limit to what they can achieve.

You remember when Paul and Barnabas went out on their first missionary journey in Acts 13 and Acts 14. When Paul and Barnabas returned from this first missionary journey described in those two chapters, they reported on that journey to the church at Antioch, which sent them out. It says in Acts 14:27: “And when they were come, and had gathered the church together, they rehearsed all that God had done with them, and how he had opened the door of faith unto the Gentiles.” So Jesus went before Paul and Barnabas, He opened doors of opportunity, He opened the doors of men’s hearts and minds, He opened the doors of the Kingdom of God, and those Gentiles were brought in.

Now the reason why Jesus is choosing to use this church in the way in which He’s going to use it, even though it’s small and even though it’s poor, is because—notice verse 8: “for thou hast a little strength,”—notice—“and hast kept my word, and hast not denied my name.” The open door is opened because you have kept my word and not denied my name. Now it says, they “had kept my word;” that is, they faithfully lived by all the commands Jesus had given to the church, as to its form, and as to its function, and as to its message. We want Jesus, as it were, to walk into our church and say of our church, You people have kept my word. The form of your church, the function of your church, and the message of your church is all in order, according to what I have instructed you to do.



Then He says, You have not denied my name. That is, when the church at Philadelphia was persecuted, they did not deny their Savior, they did not deny their faith, and they did not abandon their loyalty to Him. They would rather die than deny. They would rather die than deny that Jesus is Lord. In a word, they had been obedient to Christ and they had been defiant to the world. They had submitted to Christ, and they had scorned the approval of the world. The result is that they will triumph over the Devil through the power and the triumph of Christ.

Not only are they going to go out and spoil Satan's kingdom, and bring his people into the Kingdom of Christ, but notice verse 9. This is fascinating. "Behold, I will make them of the synagogue of Satan, which say they are Jews, and are not, but do lie; behold, I will make them to come and worship before thy feet, and to know that I have loved thee." Not only does Jesus say, I'm going to open doors because you kept my word and you didn't deny my name, but He says, I'm also going to conquer your enemies because you kept my word and did not deny my name.

What Jesus is saying here in verse 9 is that these people in this synagogue (and of course only ethnic Jews gathered in synagogues) say they're Jews. But he says, They're not Jews. They're lying. Now, He is not attacking their ethnic, genetic descent. What He's saying is that they claim to be the covenant people of God, and they're not. You remember what Paul says in Romans 2:28 and 29: "28 For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh: 29 but he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God."

So He says, Jews are not defined by ethnic descent, Jews are not defined by circumcision of the body. Jews are now defined by having regenerate hearts. If you are born again of Jesus Christ, you have a circumcised heart, and if you have a circumcised heart, Jesus says and Paul says, You are the true Jews. Galatians 3:29, "And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise."

Who are the true Jews? They're these saved Gentiles at Philadelphia. They're the real Jews, and the Jews over here in the synagogue that are claiming to be Jews are lying about being Jews. They're not Jews any longer. Ethnically, genetically, Yes; but religiously, No. The New Israel are those who are in the New Covenant, and those others were broken off branches that were cast away.

So what Jesus is saying here is that these servants of Satan who claim to be God's people but lie when they do so, who claim to be God's people but persecute God's true people, this synagogue will be conquered by Christ's sovereign power, and it will be saved by Christ's sovereign grace, and they will come and submit themselves to those they formerly persecuted, and will realize that those that they persecuted were in fact the true people of God, whom Christ loves.

Now the illustration of this is the conversion of Saul of Tarsus, right? Here's a guy who goes around, straight out of the synagogue of Satan, persecuting the Christians. And on the road to

Damascus, Jesus saves him. And what does he do? He gets up and he goes and he finds a church and he submits himself to that church and begs to be a member of it.

What Jesus is saying is, I can open the door to these Jews' hearts and I can make them come into your church and sit before your feet, and admit that you are the true people of God, and they weren't. Isaiah 60 and verse 14 says to the true people of God: "The sons also of them that afflicted thee shall come bending unto thee; and all they that despised thee shall bow themselves down at the soles of thy feet; and they shall call thee, The city of the Lord." So Jesus is saying that this prophecy is going to be fulfilled.

You know, when you read the Old Testament, it's like you have the Jews, the people of God, and the Gentiles are going to come in all these prophetic passages, and they're going to be joined to the people of God. Isn't it funny how this is fulfilled in reverse? The Gentiles are now the true Jews, and the dis-covenanted Jews are like the unsaved world, and they're coming now and submitting themselves to the true Jews, to the true Israel.

Now this can also be interpreted that on the Day of Judgment, those who persecuted the church will bow before those whom Christ owns and acknowledge that they were the true people of God and we weren't. But in the context of this opening of this door and bringing the people into the kingdom, I rather think that the right interpretation of verse 9 is that those in this particular synagogue in this town are going to get saved, and they're going to come and be part of the church of Philadelphia. And thus, the triumph of Christ over the enemies of the people of God will be visible, tangible, and immediate, as will the open door be seen. So it could have an immediate reference or it could have a reference to the Day of Judgment.

But He says, "I will make them to come and worship before thy feet, and to know that I have loved thee." See, the Jews thought God only loved them. And they're going to have to admit someday, No, God loved these Gentiles, these Christians. God loved them. They were the people of God. They are the people of God.

Well, verse 10: "Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth." Now in verse 10, Jesus gives His church the reassurance that He will protect them in the coming trials that will soon appear. Notice He says in verse 10, "Because thou hast kept the word of *my* patience." That's a very interesting phrase: "the word of my patience." This is talking about the patience of Jesus Christ, first of all.

The patience of Christ under all trials is well known. His endurance of the most adverse treatment at the hands of His enemies is set forth in Hebrews 12 and verse 3, where it says, "For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself." Consider the patience He had; consider the longsuffering He practiced; consider the steadfastness He displayed through it all.

This teaching by example that Christ gave of patient endurance under trial was a teaching that the Philadelphian Christians had kept and followed. Like Christ, they had kept on enduring without flinching, and patiently served under adversity and rejection and persecution. Jesus says, Because you kept the teaching of my example in the way I manifested patience, I will keep you also. Notice the parallel in verse 10: Because you kept, I also will keep. You've been faithful to me, I'm going to be faithful to you. I will keep you, He says, verse 10, "from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth."

Now this phrase, "all the world," does not necessarily mean the entire globe. Very often, this phrase "all the world" has limited application to a particular region or continent or kingdom. For example, in Luke chapter 2 and verse 1, it says, "there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus, that all the world should be taxed." Now did Caesar tax the folks in South America? No. "All the world" just simply meant everyone in Palestine. The tax was on Israel. In Acts chapter 11, verse 28, it says, "And there stood up one of them named Agabus, and signified by the Spirit that there should be great dearth throughout all the world: which came to pass in the days of Claudius Caesar." Well, there was a drought in Israel, but there wasn't a drought in Florida. The point is, this phrase "all the world" just refers to perhaps a region or a country, or perhaps even a locality. It's just a term that says, Everyone within this region is going to experience this event or circumstance.

Now it says here that this hour of temptation was coming on "all the world." This hour of temptation that was coming on all the world was no doubt the increasing persecution of the Christians that was to be implemented throughout the Roman Empire, which was implemented by Trajan and his successors beginning in the year 98. From the year 98 all the way through the year 300, when Constantine became the king, there was a tremendous ratcheting up of persecution against the Christians at a level of intensity that had never been known heretofore. It was starting, and had already started when the book of Revelation was written, but it was going to intensify tremendously in the future. For the next 200 years, the Roman government implemented wave after wave of empire wide persecution upon the church.

The purpose of this persecution, it says in verse 10, was "to try them that dwell upon the earth." Not just the Christians, but all the people in the Roman Empire were put to the test to show what their true nature was in this conflict between the Roman Empire and the Christians, and the persecution that resulted.

The point is, people, conflict reveals character. You want to know what somebody's really like? Watch them in the midst of conflict, and you will find out who they are. Anybody can be nice when everything's going great, and anybody can be loyal when it doesn't cost them anything. But when you see someone under conflict, you find out what their character really is. Conflict reveals whether you are on God's side or on Satan's side. So all the people who dwelled on the earth would be proven as to who they were by this conflict that was going on in the world of the Roman Empire.

But Jesus, here in verse 10, has a special promise to the believer. He says, I will keep you. He says, I will keep you *from*. Now that doesn't mean, I will take you out *of*; rather it means, I will protect you *through*, I will keep you *from* falling or failing in this hour of testing. In a word, I will preserve you and I will uphold you. You recall Jesus said in His high priestly prayer to His Father regarding His people: Father, I pray not that you would take them out of the world. Rather, I pray that you would just keep them from the evil one.

Now the Dispensationalists say, Oh, this is the rapture! The Philadelphian church represents our day, and Jesus is going to take us off the earth before the great tribulation comes. For one thing, this isn't talking about the great tribulation, it's not talking about the entire globe, it is not talking about removing people from testing—something that the people of God have always gone through, through all the ages and always will go through. Christ doesn't just say, Well, that last generation—they're going to get to escape all the troubles that the previous 30 generations have had to go through. So it's a complete abuse of this passage to use it to teach the rapture of the church so that they can escape the great tribulation. It isn't talking about that at all.

Jesus says, You have kept my word. I will keep your souls. I will keep you from falling or failing in this hour of testing that's coming through the kingdom of Rome, which will not only put you to the test, but it will put everybody to the test. So in the day of judgment, God will be able to say, Look at your behavior. When the Christians were persecuted, did you stand with them or did you stand against them? That was your test. And Jesus is saying to the church at Philadelphia, I'm going to help you pass that test. I'm going to ensure that you pass that test. I will keep you from falling or failing in this hour of testing. I will preserve you. You have kept my word, and I will keep your souls. You will pass the test. My power and grace will see to it.

Now notice verse 11a: "Behold, I come quickly." Once again, this is not talking about the second coming. He is saying, I will come quickly to your aid. When this tribulation comes that's going to put you and others to the test, He says, I will come quickly to your aid. As quickly as the hour of testing comes, that quickly will I come to preserve you in it and through it. I will not leave you by yourself for a moment. Now you know that if you're in trouble and somebody immediately comes to your aid, it's good, right? And that's what Jesus is saying. He says, There's coming this hour of temptation that's going to put everyone to the test, and I'm going to come quickly to be with you. When that comes, I will come just as fast as it comes.

I've had people say to me, You know, I hear about these Christians or those Christians going through this or that, and I don't think I could ever do that. And I say to them, Well right now, you couldn't, because Christ hasn't put you there. But at the moment He puts you there, He will also give you the grace and the strength and the ability to deal with it. And because you're not there, you don't have that strength and ability, and no, you couldn't handle it. But when the trial comes, immediately also comes the grace and strength and presence and power of Christ to help you overcome it. I mean, you look back at your life, and you look at the stuff you've gone through, and you think, I couldn't go through that now. Well, if you were called to go through it

again, you could, because Jesus would come quickly and help you. He wouldn't leave you alone for a moment.

Well, that's His commendation. And that brings us to his warning, verse 11b. He says, "Behold, I come quickly: hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown." "Hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown." In other words, people, just keep doing what you have been doing. Cling to the pattern of behavior and belief, and the pattern of works and witness that you have practiced up to this point. Church at Philadelphia, change nothing. Stay the course. Maintain your former obedience. And if you do so, you will retain your crown of reward, your crown of redemption.

Notice what He says in verse 11: Behold, I come quickly: hold that fast which thou hast"—keep on doing what you've been doing. I don't have any correction for you. Why? So that no man takes your crown. Now the crown here, of course, is the crown of reward and it is the crown of redemption. Notice Revelation 2 and verse 10. He says, "Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer: behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days: be thou faithful unto death"—here it is—"and I will give thee a crown of life." So He says to the people at Philadelphia, Take heed that no man takes your crown of life from you.

What He is saying here is, If you are faithful in the future, like you have been in the past, you will have the crown of life. Those who go apostate under persecution lose their claim to eternal life. Those who persecuted them — and they gave in to that persecution and they broke Christ's word and they denied Christ's name—those persecutors have effectively taken their crown of life. Those who go apostate under persecution lose their claim of having eternal life. They show themselves to have never been true believers.

So this, then, is the warning. It is a warning to not change. Isn't that amazing? It is a warning to not repent of who they were and what they had done. Jesus says, Don't you dare change, and don't you dare repent of who and what you are, in terms of how the church has functioned and what the church has taught. Now individually, as sinners, we always need to repent and change, don't we? But we can be sinners working on our sanctification, and yet have a church that is obedient to Christ in its form, in its function, and in its message—a church that doesn't need to change. That's what He's saying to them: Don't change, just hold fast to what you've been doing and who you are.

That brings us, thirdly, to the conclusion to the letter. The introduction to the letter, the message of the letter, and now the conclusion of the letter is in verses 12 and 13: "<sup>12</sup>Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out: and I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, which is new Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from my God: and I will write upon him my new name." That's the promise made.

Notice, then, promise is made to the overcomer, verse 12, “Him that overcometh.” And of course, in every one of these letters, the promise is only made to the overcomer, not to the mere professor. The overcomer is who? Someone who, like the Philadelphians, keeps the word of Christ and does not deny His name. They are those who, like the Philadelphians, follow the example of Jesus of patient endurance under suffering. They are those who keep on being faithful in keeping His word and not denying His name, and having patient endurance under suffering for a lifetime. And they are those who never repent of it. They never repent of keeping Christ’s word, they never repent of not denying His name, they never repent of patient endurance under suffering. They just keep on maintaining those things for a lifetime. They are the overcomers, and to them, Jesus makes two promises.

Promise number one, He says, “I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out.” A pillar is something that never moves. Its place is fixed and permanent, it stays where it’s at forever. So the believer will forever remain in God’s temple in heaven, and never will he ever run any risk of ever being removed from that temple or of being put out of that temple once he has entered into it. Now you can take furniture in and out of a building, but pillars? Not so much. You take the pillar out, the building collapses, right? Once you put pillars in the building, they stay in the building forever. And Jesus is saying, Once I bring you into my heavenly temple, you will be there forever. You will never be moved out.

So the overcomer will have a permanent place in the temple of God forever. And the desire of David in Psalm 27 and verse 4 will be fulfilled for every believer, when he says, “One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to enquire in his temple.” David said, I want to go in the temple and I don’t ever want to leave. And Jesus is saying, That is exactly what the redeemed are going to have. It’ll be church every day, all day, for all of eternity. And people who don’t want to go to church, think they want to go to heaven? They would be miserable there. Be a pillar in the temple, always present, never leaving? Only those who love Jesus and love His worship and love His house and love His people are going to love heaven.

So if you don’t love His church here, you’re never even going to wind up being in His church there, because where is Jesus’ heart? It’s with His churches. Why is He writing these seven letters? He’s writing them to His churches. His heart is in His church, and our heart needs to be in the church.

The second promise He makes here is that He will have several names written on Him, three of them in fact. Verse 12: “I will write upon him the name of my God,” number one. Number two, “and the name of the city of my God, which is new Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from my God.” And number three, “I will write upon him my new name.” So, “the name of my God,” “the name of the city of my God,” and “my [own] new name,” Jesus says will all be written on the overcomer.

Now names are symbols of ownership and identification. When you bear the name of some one or some thing, that means you belong to it or them. For example, all my children bear my name. Every one of them is a “Doner.” I gave them my name as a symbol that they belong to me, and that they were part of my family, and it was a declaration on my part that I would protect them and provide for them and take them as my own forever. We are called by the name “Americans” because we belong to this country and we’re citizens of it.

So when these names are written on us, it is being declared that we belong to God, that we belong to the New Jerusalem, and we belong to Christ. We are members of the family, we are citizens of the City, and we are joint heirs with Jesus Christ. All of that is wrapped in us having these names on us.

This then is the promise made. The promise made is that we will be a pillar in the temple of our God and that we will have the names of God and the New Jerusalem and Jesus written on us to show their ownership of us, our identification with them, their protection of us, and our forever inclusion in their family.

Then notice the exhortation given, verse 13. Having seen the promise made, now the exhortation given: “<sup>13</sup>He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.” Now what’s the Holy Spirit saying to us today? What should we be hearing? Well there is a ton of things I said that we could be listening to, but I want to emphasize just one of them.

What is the Spirit saying to us? The Spirit is saying to us that we must pray to Him who has the key of David to open the door to men’s hearts so that our gospel witness might enter, and so that they might enter into heaven. You know, this is one of the reasons why we pray for the salvation of people. We are praying to Him who has the keys to men’s hearts. He has the keys to the kingdom of God. And if He opens those hearts and opens that kingdom, then those people will become saved. Without that, there is no hope of their salvation.

Paul says in Colossians 4 and verse 3 to the Colossian church, Pray for us, “that God would open unto us a door of utterance, to speak the mystery of Christ, for which I am also in bonds.” So Paul says to the Colossians, Pray for us that when we go out and preach the mystery of Christ, God will open the doors so that message can go in.

Now when God opens doors, it doesn’t mean it’s going to be a cakewalk. Open doors are always accompanied by adversaries. In First Corinthians 16 and verse 9, Paul says, “For a great door and effectual is opened unto me, and there are many adversaries.” So even when Jesus opens the door, it doesn’t mean we’re not going to go through that door and gain that victory without a fight.

So what we need to do is not just mechanically preach the gospel and pass out tracts. We need to pray for those we witness to. We need to pray for those that we have influence over for the gospel. “Oh, Lord Jesus. You have the key of David in your hand. Lord Jesus, open this heart,

open this door, open your kingdom, admit this one into your presence. May he or she become a pillar in the temple of God. And Lord Jesus, may you write your name on them. Lord, you know that we tried to keep your word. Lord, you know we've tried not to deny your name. Lord, we've been patient under suffering. And so, Lord, we're grateful for the way you've protected us in our tribulations and preserved us. But Oh Lord, we're not content just to be preserved. We want to see the kingdom expanded. Lord Jesus, use your key. Open a door of utterance for us so that we can say that a great and effectual door was opened by Christ, and souls were brought into the kingdom."

Now it's up to Him as to how He answers that prayer. But that's how we need to be praying, and that's what the Spirit is saying to us this morning, and that's what we need to be hearing. May the Lord be pleased to grant such a prayer. Shall we pray.

Our Father, we've already uttered our mind, but Lord, we do ask that He who has the key of David would open doors. Father, how many times we have witnessed, only to see a closed heart, a closed mind. And Lord, I just pray that that would be reversed, and that you would grant to us a great ingathering of souls. And Father, even those of the synagogue of Satan, those who actively persecute us, may they come and dwell among us as fellow worshipers of Jesus. Father, we pray that many a Saul of Taurus would be made into a Paul. Father, we ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen.