

The Faithful Church

Revelation 3:7-13

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Review: Rev 3:1-6 – The Dead Church

- Beware of getting complacent because of a good reputation; this should make us more diligent.
- The Lord always has His remnant; be a part of the remnant!
- Overcomers have eternal security.

Revelation 3:7 – To the church at Philadelphia.

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''

What do we know about the city of *Philadelphia*?

The name means *brotherly love*; it was the youngest of the seven cities, and was originally founded as a missionary outpost for Hellenism, the culture of ancient Greece.

- The original purpose behind this key city was to make it a center for spreading Greek language, culture and manners throughout the Asian provinces.
- Philadelphia had been built with the deliberate intention that it might become a missionary city to spread the Greek language and way of life.

Philadelphia was a *prosperous* city commanding one of the greatest highways in the world, the highway which led from Europe to the East.

- This city was also known for beautiful buildings (it was called the “little Athens”) and her earthquakes, which required frequent evacuations.

How did Jesus describe Himself?

Jesus reminded the church in Philadelphia that He was **holy** and **true**. These do not describe “tendencies” within Jesus, but His very being. They also show that Jesus is Yahweh, because He alone is **holy** in an absolute sense.

- There are two Greek words for **true**. One means “**true** and not *false*.” The other means “**true** and not *fake*.”
- The Greek word used here for **true** (*alethinos*) is the second, with the idea of “real” or “genuine.”
- Jesus is **true** in all of who He is; He is the *real* God and the *real* man.

What does it mean *Jesus has the key of David, He who opens and no one shuts, and shuts and no one opens*?

Jesus showed He is also the keeper of the keys and doors. In this quotation from Isaiah 22:20-23, Jesus expressed His power and authority, especially to admit and exclude.

Revelation 3:8 – What Jesus knows about the church

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.

What works did Jesus know of Philadelphia?

The church at Philadelphia had served God well in difficult circumstances, and Jesus knew it.

What is this open-door Jesus set before Philadelphia?

Often, an **open door** speaks of evangelistic opportunity (1 Corinthians 16:9, 2 Corinthians 2:12, and Colossians 4:3).

- Jesus told them He had opened a **door** of evangelistic opportunity for them to go through in faith.

There may be another sense to this open door... It seems Christians in Philadelphia were excluded from the synagogue (Revelation 3:9).

- The open door may also speak of their opportunity to enter God's kingdom in contrast with exclusion from the synagogue.

How does God open doors of evangelistic opportunity?

He brings people into our lives who do not know Him. And if they know we are a Christian through our speech, they will ask us questions if they are responding to the Holy Spirit...

1 Cor 3:6 – *I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase.*

And we can test how responsive they are to the Holy Spirit by asking our own questions...

- Have you given any thought to life after death?
- Are you sure you are going to heaven when you die?
- Why do you expect to go to heaven when you die?

What does it tell us that no one can shut the open-door Jesus sets before us?

The emphasis is on unhindered openness. There is nothing that can keep us from accessing this door Jesus opens for us. The choice to enter these open-doors is ours alone.

What does it mean they *have a little strength*?

The term **a little strength** does not imply weakness, but *real strength*. They were weak enough to be strong in the Lord. We can be “too strong” or “too big” or too sure of ourselves for God to really use us.

- The church in Philadelphia had the poverty of spirit to know they really needed God’s strength.
- The Apostle Paul was a great example of this dynamic of weakness and strength. God’s strength was made evident in his weaknesses (2 Corinthians 12:7-10).

How had the church at Philadelphia been faithful?

They had been faithful to Jesus and His word. The idea behind **have not denied My name** is not only that they expressed their allegiance to Jesus, but that they *lived* in a way that was faithful to the name and character of Jesus.

- Some churches that claim faithfulness to the **word** of Jesus deny His **name** — His character. They represent the manner and style of Jesus as something very different from what the Bible shows.

Why was Jesus pleased with the Philadelphia church?

Look at the features of the church in Philadelphia:

- They had responded to the evangelistic open door
- They relied on God
- They were faithful to Jesus

In some ways, these features seem unspectacular. They should be commonplace among churches. Jesus had *nothing* negative to say to the church at Philadelphia.

How should we measure success as a church?

The church of Philadelphia is commended for keeping the Word of the Lord and not denying His Name. Success in Christian work is not to be measured by any other standard of achievement.

- It is not the number of new buildings which have been built through a man’s ministry.
- It is not the crowds that flock to listen to any human voice.

All of these things are frequently used as yardsticks of success, but they are earthly and not heavenly measures.

Rev 3:9-10 – What Jesus will do for Philadelphia

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. 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.

What was *the synagogue of Satan*?

Apparently, the Christians in Philadelphia were persecuted by Jewish people (**the synagogue**). However, these persecuting Jews were Jews in name only (**who say they are Jews and are not, but lie**). In fact, they had no spiritual connection to Abraham or to the people of faith.

How have people used this passage to justify persecution of Jews?

Jesus did not speak against *all* Jewish people here. It would be entirely wrong to speak of the Jewish people as a whole as **the synagogue of**.

- Jesus spoke of this specific group of Jewish people in Philadelphia who persecuted Christians in that day.

How is it Jesus would make their persecutors worship before their feet?

Jesus promised that He would vindicate His people and make sure that their persecutors recognized they were wrong, and that Jesus and His followers were right.

- The idea is of vindication before self-righteous “spiritual” persecutors.

When would the persecutors of the church worship before their feet?

Romans 14:11 – *As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to Me, and every tongue shall confess to God*

This will certainly happen at the Great White Throne Judgment, Rev 20. And all Christians will be there near the throne of the Lord.

- This is not that Christians will be worshiped, but God will be worshipped in the *presence* of Christians.
- They will know that Jesus had **loved** the people they once persecuted.

What application is there of this in the here and now?

Another way that persecutors of the church can come to worship God in the presence of Christians is to become Christians themselves.

- It is better for that to happen while they still have their mortal lives than at the Great White Throne.
- So, pray for your persecutors!

What beautiful promise did Jesus give to His faithful?

I will keep you from the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world: Most Bible scholars see this **hour of trial** as a prophetic reference to the Great Tribulation, which precede Jesus' earthly kingdom. Jesus promised to **keep** these Christians from that **hour of trial**.

- This is a strong proof-text for the pre-Trib rapture.

How do we know this hour of trial is the Tribulation?

To test those who dwell on the earth: The test is directed against **those who dwell on the earth**. This phrase is used nine times in the Book of Revelation, and it speaks of those who are *not* saved in Jesus.

Revelation 17:8 – *And those who dwell on the earth will marvel, whose names are not written in the Book of Life from the foundation of the world.*

The term, *those who dwell on the earth*, is synonymous with the lost; this **test** is for *unbelievers*, not Christians.

- Though Christians walk on this earth, our dwelling place is in heaven. We have been seated in heavenly places in Jesus (Ephesians 2:6).
- We do not **dwell on the earth**, our life is hidden in Jesus (Colossians 3:3).
- We are in the world but not of the world (John 17:16)

Could keeping the faithful from the hour of trial promise protection in it?

Those who believe the church will be on earth during the Great Tribulation focus on Jesus' **command to persevere**, and say the context demands seeing this as protection that enables the faithful to **persevere** in the period.

- However, persevere is in the past tense, showing it is something that the Christians had already done before the hour of trial.
- The promise is a reward for past perseverance, not the equipping to persevere in the future.

Those who believe Jesus will come for His church before the Tribulation note that protection is promised from the very hour of trial, not just the trial itself.

- Also, the ones tested by this **hour of trial** are not believers, but **those who dwell on the earth**.

Rev 3:11 – What Jesus wants Philadelphia to do

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

What does it mean Jesus is coming quickly?

The expression 'quickly' is to be understood as something which is sudden and unexpected, not necessarily immediate.

- The point is, to be prepared for His coming.

What should the Lord's faithful do?

Hold fast what you have: The church at Philadelphia must not depart from its solid foundation, as described in Revelation 3:8:

- Evangelistic opportunity (*I have set before you an open door*).
- Reliance on God (*You have a little strength*).
- Faithfulness to Jesus (*have kept My word, and have not denied My name*).

These things can and must continue among the church in Philadelphia, but it will only happen as they **hold fast what they have**.

What would be the consequence for not holding fast to what they have?

That no one may take your crown: Loss of reward...

- If they failed to **hold fast**, their **crown** might be given to another. The idea is not that it might be *stolen* by another, but *given*.

Is this crown a crown of royalty?

This was not a crown of royalty, given because of royal birth. This was a crown of victory.

- Jesus encouraged His saints to finish their course with victory, to "play the second half" just as strongly as they "played the first half."
- The one most likely to steal your crown is *yourself*.

Revelation 3:12 – A promise of reward.

He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he shall go out no more. 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 I will write on him My new name.

What does it mean that overcomers will be a pillar?

Overcomers were told that they would be as a **pillar in the temple of My God**. Pillars were pictures of strength, stability, and dignified beauty.

- Philadelphia suffered from frequent earthquakes. When a building collapsed in an earthquake often all that remained standing were the huge pillars.
- True pillars in the church support the church, and they look to Jesus as their support foundation.

What does it mean that overcomers shall go out no more?

The overcomer would have a place of permanence and stability with God, in contrast to an uncertain place in this world.

- The citizens of Philadelphia lived an unsettled life... Whenever one of the frequent earthquakes came, they fled the city to escape the falling masonry

What names will the overcomers receive?

The overcomer also received many names — of God, the New Jerusalem, and the new name of Jesus.

- These names are marks of identification because they show who we belong to.
- They are marks of intimacy, because they show we are privileged to know Him in ways others are not.

This works together well with the image of a **pillar**. In the ancient world, having a special inscribed pillar added to one of the temples sometimes honored a faithful city servant or distinguished priest.

- Philadelphia honored its illustrious sons by putting their names on the pillars of its temples, so that all who came to worship might see and remember.

Revelation 3:13 – An exhortation to all who will hear.

He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

How may we as individuals receive the praise and encouragement of the Philadelphian believers?

If we will be like this church, we must stay on their foundation, which was Jesus' name and Jesus' word.

- We must also depend on their source of strength which was Jesus, not themselves.

What applications come to mind from this passage?

- God opens doors of opportunity for us; it is up to us to go through them.
- Little strength is great strength if it causes us to depend more on God.
- We should pray that those who persecute us should become fellow children of God.
- Overcomers will be kept from the Tribulation!
- Overcomers will receive rewards and be recognized for their faithfulness.