

6 – PHILADELPHIA: “The Faithful Church”



APRIL 20-21, 2021

⁷ To the angel of the church in Philadelphia write: These are the words of Him who is holy and true, who holds the key of David. What He opens no one can shut, and what He shuts no one can open. ⁸ I know your deeds. See, I have placed before you an open door that no one can shut. I know that you have little strength, yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name. ⁹ I will make those who are of the synagogue of Satan, who claim to be Jews though they are not, but are liars — I will make them come and fall down at your feet and acknowledge that I have loved you. ¹⁰ Since you have kept my command to endure patiently, I will also keep you from the hour of trial that is going to come upon the whole world to test those who live on the earth. ¹¹ I am coming soon. Hold on to what you have, so that no one will take your crown. ¹² Him who overcomes I will make a pillar in the temple of my God. Never again will he leave it. I will write on him the name of my God and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which is coming down out of heaven from my God; and I will also write on him my new name. ¹³ He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. -- Revelation 3:7-13 (NIV)

As we continue in our examination and exegesis of the letters to the Seven Churches, observe our Lord's salutation to this the sixth church locationally known as the church in Philadelphia. Jesus Christ presented Himself to the church at Philadelphia as **“He that is holy.”** This is tantamount to declaring that He is God, which, of course, He is. Jesus Christ is holy in His character, His words, His actions, and His purposes. As the Holy One, ***He is uniquely set apart from everything else, and nothing can be compared to Him.*** Which gives us insight to the need and/or status of this particular church.

A little bit of background. It was founded by one of the rulers I guess you could say, someone who was in charge, his name was Attalus, Attalus. And the reason it became known as Philadelphia was because of this guy named Attalus, this was like 150 BC or so. And you'd never guess how he felt about his brother. He loved his brother, in fact, he had a nickname, brother lover. And so, that's the name Philadelphia, to love your brother. And so, it's the city of brotherly love, not much unlike Philadelphia in the United States, which is supposed to be the city of brotherly love, as well. That's what the name means.

God's inspired words to the congregation at Philadelphia are an uplifting message of hope and encouragement. Unlike the other letters to the churches in Revelation 2 and 3, correction is not to be found. But there is an admonition ... *“to continue what they were already doing.”* Christ promised them great rewards for their faithful perseverance.

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But He is also the One who is true - that is, genuine. He is the original ... not a copy, the authentic God and not a manufactured one. There were hundreds of false gods and goddesses in those days (cp. 1 Cor 8:5-6), but only Jesus Christ could rightfully claim to be the true God.

- It's also worth noting that when the martyrs in heaven addressed the Lord, they called Him “***holy and true***” (Rev 6:10). Their argument was that, because He was and is holy, He had to judge sin, and because He was true, He had, to vindicate His people who had been wickedly slain.

Not only is He holy and true, but ... ***He has, the authority to open and close doors!*** The background of this imagery is Isaiah 22:15-25. Assyria had invaded Judah (as Isaiah had warned), but the Jewish leaders were trusting Egypt, not God, to deliver the nation. One of the treacherous leaders was a man named Shebna who had used his office, not for the good of the people, but for his own private gain. God saw to it that Shebna was removed from office and that a faithful man, Eliakim, was put in his place and given the keys of authority. Eliakim was a picture of Jesus Christ ... a dependable administrator of the affairs of God's people. Jesus Christ also has the keys of hades and of death (Rev. 1:18).

In the New Testament, an “***open door***” speaks of “***opportunity for ministry***” (Acts 14:27; 1 Cor. 16:9; 2 Cor. 2:12; Col. 4:3). Christ is the Lord of the harvest and the Head of the church, and it is He who determines where and when His people shall serve (see Acts 16:6-10). ***He gave the church at Philadelphia a great opportunity for ministry!***

But could they take advantage of it? There were at least two obstacles to overcome, ***the first*** being their own lack of strength (Rev. 3:8). Apparently, this was not a large or a strong church; however, it was a faithful one. They were true to God's Word and unafraid to bear His name. Rev. 3:10 suggests that they had endured some special testing and had proved faithful. ***It's not the size or strength of a church that determines its ministry, but faith in the call and command of the Lord. “God's commandments are God's enablements.”*** In other words ... *If Jesus Christ gave them an open door ... then He would see to it that they were able to walk through it!*

The second obstacle was the opposition of the Jews in the city (Rev. 3:9). This was really the opposition of Satan, for we do not battle against flesh and blood (Eph. 6:12). These people may have been Jews in the flesh, but they were not “*true Israel*” in the New Testament sense (Romans 2:17-29).

Another weapon was probably false accusation, for this is the way the unbelieving Jews often attacked Paul. ***Satan is the accuser ... and he uses even religious people to assist him*** (Rev. 12:10). ***It is not easy to witness for Christ when the leading people in the community are spreading lies about you!*** The church at Smyrna faced the same kind of opposition (Rev. 2:9).

- The believers in Philadelphia were in a similar situation to that of Paul when he wrote 1 Cor. 16:9 ... *there were both opportunities and obstacles!*

Unbelief sees the obstacles ... but faith sees the opportunities! And since the Lord holds the keys, He is in control of the outcome! So what do we have to fear? *Nobody can close the doors ... as long as He keeps them open! Fear, unbelief, and delay have caused the church to miss many God-given opportunities.*

Jesus Gave Three Wonderful and Encouraging Promises To This Church.

First ... He would take care of their enemies (Rev. 3:9). One day, these people would have to acknowledge that the Christians were right! (see Isa. 60:14; Phil. 2:10-11) ***If we take care of God's work, He will take care of our battles!***

Second ... He would keep them from Tribulation (Rev. 3:10). This is certainly a reference to the time of Tribulation that John described in Rev. 6-19, ***“the time of Jacob's trouble.”*** This is not speaking about some local trial, because it involves ***“them that dwell on the earth”*** (cp. Rev. 6:10; 8:13; 11:10; 12:12; 13:8,12,14; 14:6; 17:2,8). The immediate reference would be to the official Roman persecutions that would come, but the ultimate reference is to the Tribulation that will encompass the earth before Jesus Christ returns to establish His kingdom. **This is clearly a reference to the “rapture.”**

The third promise to the Philadelphians ... is that God would honor them (Rev. 3:12). The symbolism in this verse would be especially meaningful to people who lived in constant danger of earthquakes: the stability of the pillar, no need to go out or to flee, a heavenly city that nothing could destroy. Ancient cities often honored great leaders by erecting pillars with their names inscribed on them. God's pillars are not made of stone, because there is no temple in the heavenly city (Rev. 21:22). ***His pillars are faithful people who bear His name for His glory (Gal. 2:9).***

In a very real sense, the church today is like the Philadelphian church, for God has set before us many open doors of opportunity. If He opens the doors, we must work; if He shuts the doors, we must wait. Above all, we must be faithful to Him and see the opportunities, not the obstacles. If we miss our opportunities, we lose our rewards (crowns), and this means being ashamed before Him when He comes. **Amen.**

“You’ve Got Mail ...”