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A0523 – June 05, 2005 – Revelation 3:7-13 – Philadelphia: The Church of Deliverance

Last week we looked at the pitifully complacent church of Sardis. This church had a reputation of being a spiritually vibrant community but our Lord's scathingly remarked that they were "dead", a clear indication that our Lord takes complacency seriously. This church was on the bottom rung of spirituality. Today there is on lighthouse and not one Christian family in the city of Sart. This week we turn from this scathing report to a refreshing letter written to the Church in Philadelphia. This church is known as the Church of Deliverance because they are promised to escape the hour of trial. Before we read this letter I'll give you the structure.

Structure of Philadelphia Letter

Recipient, Destination and Description of Christ (3:7)

Commendation (3:8a, 8c)

Promises (3:8b, 9-10, 12)

Exhortation (3:11, 13)

You'll notice that there is no condemnation of this Church. The need merely hold fast what they have until Christ comes. You'll want to pay special attention to verse 10, a highly debated verse in the NT.

Revelation 3:7 "And to the messenger 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—that you have a little power [yet] you have kept My word, and have not denied My name. ⁹'Behold, I will give [some] of the synagogue of Satan, who say that they are Jews and are not, but lie—behold I will make them come and bow down at your

feet, and *make them* know that I have loved you ¹⁰ 'because you have kept the word of My perseverance. And I will keep you from the hour of trial which is about to come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth. ¹¹ 'I am coming quickly; hold fast what you have, so that no one will take your crown. ¹² 'He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he will not go outside 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 'He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.'

Recipient, Destination and Description of Christ (3:7)

Revelation 3:7 "And to the messenger 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:

The recipient of the letter is a human messenger who is a spiritual representative of the church.

The destination is the **church in Philadelphia**. **Philadelphia**, of course, means “brotherly love” (*philos* –friendly love and *adelphos* – brother). The city was located 25 miles southeast of Sardis. The company of travelers had been reduced to two as the Scroll of Revelation was nearing its completed circuit to the seven churches of Asia.

The city of **Philadelphia** was located along one of the most important trade routes of the ancient world. The road was extremely important for spreading Rome’s influence and the Greek language. In later Byzantine times this road became the greatest trade route in the whole country.

Its geographical location was not so good though. It lay on the edge of a fault line where volcanoes and earthquakes were quite frequent. In fact, if you recall last week, the city of Sardis had felt the effects of a major earthquake in AD17. Philadelphia, just twenty-five miles away also felt the effects, yet on a larger scale. The city had not recovered even by the time Revelation was written in 96AD. The reason the re-building was so slow was because of fear and the frequent aftershocks. Some of the people actually delayed re-building and set up tents on the outer fringes of the city. The fear factor only heightened when an earthquake destroyed the nearby city of Laodicea in 60AD.

The major business in this city was agriculture, particularly vineyards. The volcanic ash made the soil uniquely fertile and suited for a successful economy. However, the wine business was severely hampered when the Empire made the city cut down half of its vines and plant corn instead because of a sudden need. The city was dependent on the wine and Dionysius, the god of wine, was the principle deity in the city. There is no doubt this Imperial action frustrated the people and the economy of an already struggling city.

According to this letter there was a large Jewish synagogue in this city although archaeology has not discovered it yet, though there must have been one. The two key points to keep in mind in relation to this letter are the earthquakes which had the effect of limiting their resources (3:8) and the large Jewish population who were persecuting these Christians (3:9).

The description of Christ does not come from chapter 1. Instead, four titles are given here, all are attributes of Christ. *First* of all Christ is called **holy**. The word **holy** means “divided, set apart”. Christ was set apart two ways. First, He was “set apart” from sin (both sin nature and personal sin). Second, He was “set apart” to His Father and fulfilling His Father’s will. This is what it means to say Christ is holy. *Second*, Christ is described as **true**. The word here for “true” is not “truth” (*aletheia*) but “genuineness” (*alethinos*). Christ is the “truth” (John 14:6) but here Christ is true or “genuine” in contrast to false. The same word is used in John 15:1 when Christ said, “I am the true vine”. He was saying, “I am the genuine vine in contrast to false vines”. Here Christ is being described as “the real Messiah”. The implication of this description of Christ as “the real One” is that Christ can be trusted. All that follows in this letter is absolute truth because the real Messiah says it. *Third*, Christ is described as the One **who has the key of David**. “keys” symbolize “sovereign authority”. One who has keys has sovereign authority over some domain. Christ has the keys of David’s domain. And David’s domain is the Davidic Kingdom. Therefore, Christ has sovereign authority over entrance into the Davidic Kingdom.



He is of the lineage of David (1:5) and therefore has authority to possess the keys of David. The Jews in this city who are persecuting these Christians do not have access to the Messianic Kingdom unless they are converted and Christ lets them in. *Fourth*, Christ is described as the One **who opens and no one will shut, and who shuts and no one opens**. This points to Christ’s omnipotence. Jesus alone has the power to admit people or exclude

them from His kingdom. So, these four descriptions of Christ describe four of His divine attributes. He is holy, He is truth or genuine, He is sovereign, and He is omnipotent.

Commendation (3:8a, 8c)

Revelation 3:8a 'I know your deeds—that you have a little power [yet] you have kept My word, and have not denied My name.

Next we have an interrupted commendation. Notice that Christ begins by saying **I know your deeds** and then He doesn't list any **deeds** but interrupts with the phrase, **Behold, I have put before you an open door which no one can shut**— This statement is really a parenthetical statement. It will help you see what is happening if you put parentheses around the phrase **Behold, I have put before you an open door which no one can shut**. In fact, let's read this verse without that parenthetical statement so you can see what I'm getting at.

I know your deeds, (*Behold, I have put before you an open door which no one can shut*) that you have a little power [yet] you have kept My word, and have not denied My name.

So, first, let's deal with the actual deeds and then we'll get to the parenthetical remark in a moment. The parenthetical remark is really a promise from Christ not a **deed** of the Philadelphian Christians. First, Christ says **I know...that you have a little power**. What does it mean that they **have a little power**? Well, the city has been ravaged by earthquakes. If you've been to a place that has gone through an earthquake and has not recovered yet then you know how limited resources are. That's what Christ is talking about. They are limited in their resources. They don't have much to work with but what they do have they are using resourcefully. They are being very efficient with what God has given them. We might call them frugal and Christ is commending them for their frugal resourcefulness. They don't have a lot of resources but they are getting results. Next Christ says, **and you have kept My word and have not denied My name** but it should be translated **[yet] you have kept My word**. In other words, despite the fact that you were low on resources you did not detract from being obedient to My word and holding My name high. See, these Christians were under persecution at one time from those who called themselves Jews. They were tempted to deny Christ's word and His name. But they had met the test victoriously by remaining obedient and faithful to Christ's word even with limited resources.

Now let's back up and deal with the parenthetical statement in verse 8b. This is the first of six promises in the letter.

Promises (3:8b, 9-10, 12)

Revelation 3:8b Behold, I have put before you an open door which no one can shut—

It's almost as if, when Christ began to speak He couldn't wait to encourage these Christians. He was so pleased with their sterling works that He decides to promise them something right up front. The promise is that Christ has **put before them an open door which no one can shut**. If Jesus Christ has the keys of David and therefore sovereign authority to open and shut then this promise is that Jesus Christ has put **before** the Philadelphians **an open door** into the Davidic Kingdom **which no one can shut**. This is a promise of certain entrance into the Davidic Kingdom. No matter what their Jewish persecutors say or do they cannot keep these believers from entering the Messianic Kingdom. This early promise will encourage them in the face of their persecutors.

Revelation 3:9 'Behold, I will give [some] of the synagogue of Satan, who say that they are Jews and are not, but lie—behold I will make them come and bow down at your feet, and *make them* know that I have loved you

Verse 9 describes the persecution they have been undergoing as well as giving a second promise. Christ says, **Behold, I will give [some] of the synagogue of Satan, who say that they are Jews and are not, but lie--**. The idea is that Christ is giving some of these people to be their converts. Those who were of the **synagogue of Satan** were

- They were physical descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob but they were not spiritual descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.
- They were physically circumcised but not spiritually circumcised.
- They had the circumcision of the flesh but not the circumcision of the heart.
- According to the NT, a true Jew is one who is both a physical descendant of Jacob as well as a one who has believed in the Messiahship of Jesus.

When a physical Jew believes in Jesus as Messiah his Jewishness is completed. Otherwise, as Christ says they are not **Jews**. They may say they are Jews **but they are not, they lie**. Because of the beaming witness of this lighthouse Christ is going to **give some of these Jews** as converts to the Philadelphian church.

Then Christ goes on to say **behold I will make them come and bow down at your feet, and make them know that I have loved you.** This quite possibly refers to a time when some of the false Jews actually were converted and came and bowed down before the Philadelphian Christians, thanking them for their Christ-like witness even in the midst of their persecutions as well as apologizing for their past actions against them. Or, doubtfully, this could refer to a forced submission and homage similar to Phil 2:9-11 where it says “every knee will bow and every tongue confess that Jesus is Lord”. I tend to doubt this view very seriously.

Also Christ will make them **know that He has loved them.** These false Jews have scoffed at the Philadelphian Christians when they said “God loves us” but they will know that God truly does love them when they believe in Christ and become His followers too.

Before we charge into verse 10, the key verse, there are some grammatical changes necessary.¹ First of all, the word **Because** should not be capitalized. It is not the beginning of a new sentence but the closing phrase of verse 9. The **because** (*hoti*) clause is giving the reason why these false Jews will ultimately bow down at their feet and know that Christ loved them. They will do this **because** the Philadelphian Christians **have kept the word of Christ’s perseverance.** All this is saying is that ultimately, the daily walk of these Philadelphian Christians is what will lead the false Jews to complete their Jewishness by believing in the Messiahship of Jesus. Their daily walk is one of walking as Christ walked. Christ persevered in His walk all the way to death on a cross. These Philadelphian Christians are walking after the manner Christ walked, in obedience to Christ’s commandments. Therefore, their walk will witness to and serve as the means of converting these false Jews into true Jews.

Verses 9-10 should look like this to keep the thoughts straight.

Revelation 3:9 'Behold, I will give [some] of the synagogue of Satan, who say that they are Jews and are not, but lie—behold I will make them come and bow down at your feet, and make them know that I have loved you ¹⁰ 'because you have kept the word of My perseverance. And I will keep you from the hour of trial which is about to come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth.

I’ve underlined the key changes here so we can move on to Christ’s next thought; the promise of deliverance. As I said before, this is a very controversial verse.

Revelation 3:10 'because you have kept the word of My perseverance. And I will keep you from the hour of trial which is about to come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth.

This is the fourth promise; **And I will keep you from the hour of trial which is about to come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth.** The promise is to **keep** the Philadelphian Christians **from the hour of trial**. There is no doubt here that the **hour of trial** is referring to the Tribulation, a set period of time, namely, seven literal years. The debate here revolves around how God will keep Christians from the Tribulation. There are two basic views:

- God will keep them from the Tribulation by preserving them through it.



- God will keep them from the Tribulation by removing them from the earth BEFORE the Tribulation begins.



Some of the debate here revolves around the words **keep you from** (*tereo ek*). The debate is about both words. First the word **keep** (*tereso, I will keep*). The word means “to guard, protect, preserve, keep”. The real issue is how is God going to protect Christians from the Tribulation judgments. The second debate is about the word **from** (*ek*). Some say it means “out from within” and others say it means simply “from”. Let’s look at the first view.

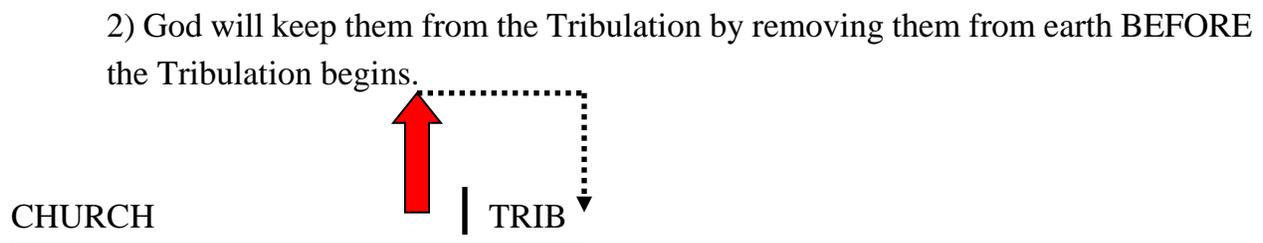
- God will keep them from the Tribulation by preserving them through it.



This would mean that believers would remain on earth during the Tribulation and God would protect them by taking them to some remote location so they don’t get hurt. This is problematic because many believers in the Tribulation will suffer martyrdom (e.g. Rev 6:9-11; 7:9-14). Many believers are not preserved. However, they will simply respond by

saying that believers will be protected from God’s wrath but not from the Antichrist’s wrath. However, this argument carries no weight for two reasons. Number one, whether it’s God’s wrath or Antichrist’s wrath doesn’t matter since either way they are not protected. Either way they experience physical death. Secondly, it can easily be proven that God’s wrath is being carried out through human instruments beginning with the 1st Seal judgment in Rev 6:1-2. A second way post-Tribulationists argue is by saying that the preposition *ek* (**from**) means “out from within” so that what Christ is saying is that believers will emerge out from within the Tribulation victorious, namely at the end of the Tribulation. But if Christ wanted to say this it would have been much better to use the prepositions *en* or *dia* which would clearly mean believers would be preserved “in” or “through” the hour of trial. But that’s not what Christ said. He said believers would be kept **from the hour of trial**, not preserved “in” it or “through” it. Contextually this argument makes little sense anyway since Christ says the **hour of trial is coming upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth**. If the Tribulation is designed to come **upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth** and Church saints will be on earth during this time then how is this promise encouraging to the Philadelphian Christians since we find out later that many of them are actually going to die! Why would they be tested since they have already been found in Christ as faithful to His word and His name? The post-tribulational explanation of this verse is bankrupt!

The fact is, there is only one possible way to **keep** Church saints **from the hour of trial**. And that is that



The pre-Tribulational Rapture is a general promise to all Church saints. 1 Thess 1:10 and 5:9-10 teach that Church Age believers, no matter what their spiritual condition, are not destined for wrath.

1 Thessalonians 5:9-10 For God has not destined us for wrath, but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, ¹⁰ who died for us, so that whether we are awake or asleep, we will live together with Him.

So, Christ is making a specific application to the Philadelphian Christians of the general promise of exemption from the wrath of the Tribulation! What Christ is promising is that these Philadelphian Christians would not enter **the hour of trial**. Interestingly, Christ does not specify the means of deliverance, does He? He doesn't promise them they will escape by way of the pre-Trib Rapture does He? He leaves the means of their escape open. There are only two ways Church saints can be kept from the Tribulation.

- Most Christians have escaped the Tribulation by physical death
- The final generation of Christians will escape the tribulation by Rapture

Therefore, this verse supports a pre-Tribulational rapture. Christ fulfilled His promise to the Philadelphian Christians by means of physical death but the promise remains for that final generation of Christians to escape by means of the pre-Trib Rapture. If we are in heaven then we will certainly be kept from the hour of trial! Now, that is a promise that the Philadelphian Christians could take to the bank. This is Christ, the holy and true one who is speaking. He is faithful to keep His word. In the context, these Christians have been putting up with persecution from false Jews. It would make no sense to promise them that they have to remain on earth and be persecuted by Satan himself during the Tribulation. A post-tribulational understanding of this verse is absurd and brings no comfort or encouragement to these obedient believers.

Christ's promise says that **the hour of trial is about to come**. The early church viewed Christ's return as an at-any-moment event. We call that imminence. It is clearly a designated period of time because Christ calls it the **hour of trial**. The Tribulation is also known as the Birth Pangs of the Messiah because it will give birth to the Messianic Kingdom which was promised earlier to the Philadelphian Christians. Therefore, these Christians will not enter the Tribulation but they will certainly enter the Davidic Kingdom which follows.

Exhortation (3:11)

Revelation 3:11 'I am coming quickly; hold fast what you have, so that no one will take your crown.

The exhortation comes in verse 11 and suggests the Doctrine of Imminence again. Christ says **I am coming quickly** or **soon**. Christ's coming is always presented as an event which can happen at-any-moment. This is supposed to be a motivation for Christians to persevere.

This expression is similar to those like “I will come as a thief” and “I stand at the door and knock”. Just look at the theme of Christ’s any-moment-coming in these seven letters.

Revelation 2:5 I am coming to you
Revelation 2:16 I am coming to you quickly
Revelation 2:25 hold fast until I come
Revelation 3:3 I will come like a thief
Revelation 3:11 I am coming quickly
Revelation 3:20 Behold, I stand at the door and knock;

The two figures of “a thief coming” and “standing at the door and knocking” were used by Jesus in Luke 12:39 and Matt 24:43. Paul, Peter, and John all borrowed these images from Jesus and use them to express Christ’s imminent coming. This means we are uncertain when it will occur but certain that it will occur. A constant expectation and watchfulness for His coming produces holiness in believers.

Jesus goes on to command these believers to **hold fast what you have**. As I said a few weeks ago **hold fast** (*krateo*) was an early Christian motto. What do they have? Three things, all mentioned in verse 8.

- 1) **that you have a little power**
- 2) **they have kept My word,**
- 3) **they have not denied My name.**

In other words, **hold fast** to your resources, **hold fast** to **My word**, and **hold fast** to **My name**. Why? Because someone is trying to take them away! Imagine how tightly you would hold on if someone were trying to take a treasure out of your arms. That’s how tightly they are to hold on to what they have.

The reason, **so that no one will take your crown**. The reality is; rewards can be lost. We must persevere in the Christian life, **hold fast** to what we have, don’t give it up to those who would love to destroy your witness and faithfulness. They only want you to forfeit the enjoyment of rewards.

Promise (3:12)

Revelation 3:12 'He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he will not go outside 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.

The promise to the overcomer is in verse 12. Remember, the overcomer is defined for us in

1 John 5:4-5 For whatever is born of God overcomes the world; and this is the victory that has overcome the world-- our faith. ⁵ Who is the one who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?

The promise is four-fold. *First, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God.* The New Jerusalem will not have a temple for God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple (Rev 21:22). Because of our intimate connection with Christ as His body we will be living pillars. Contrary to their instability in an earthquake ridden city they will be stable pillars in the New Jerusalem. *Second, he will not go outside anymore* means that **the overcomer will** never be separated from God. We are eternally secure. *Third,* the overcomer will have three new names. a) **I will write on him the name of My God.** Whenever the Son says My God He is speaking from His humanity. God's name will be written on you. Whenever we find someone's name on something that means it belongs to them. God's name written on you means you belong to God (that's eternal security folks). b) **and the name of the city of My God, the new Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God.** The name of the New Jerusalem will also be written on you. This means you will have citizenship in the New Jerusalem. You will have eternal citizenship in that city. c) Lastly you will have **My new name** written on you. That's Christ's **new name**. I don't know what this name is but you will also belong to Christ and will enjoy intimate fellowship beyond your wildest imagination as well as the ability to grasp the full theological significance of His incarnation.

Exhortation (3:13)

Revelation 3:13 'He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.'

We close with a command to hear. If you are a believer in Jesus Christ you are invited to hear and obey what Christ says to all the churches because these letters are applied to the universal church.

ⁱ See John Niemela, "For You Have Kept My Word: The Grammar of Revelation 3:10" CTS Journal 6 (January-March 2000): 14-38 and "For You Have Kept My Word: The Theology of Revelation 3:10" CTS Journal 7 (April-June 2000): 53-68

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