

The Message to Philadelphia

Revelation 3:7-13

7“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”’: 8“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. 9Indeed 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. 10Because 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. 11Behold, I am coming quickly! Hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown. 12He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he shall go out no more. 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. 13“He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.” ’

Well of necessity the message today is going to take on a different tone than the messages that we have had for the last few weeks. We have looked at the Church in Pergamos, Thyatira, and Sardis over the last three weeks and each of those churches had some pretty glaring problems. Pergamos was a church that had compromised to a great degree with the surrounding culture. Thyatira was a solid church and yet the leadership in that church had allowed the seducing Jezebel Spirit a prominent voice in the congregation. Sardis, as we saw last week was a church that had managed to escape persecution, which may look good on its face, but the way in which

they had escaped was to make themselves so much like their surrounding culture that there was no distinction between them and the culture.

Doug Wilson opens his book “Against the Church” with these words. “The Bride of Christ is white hot mess.” I don’t know if there is anyone who can disagree with that. But we must remember that in each of these churches there were some, in the case of Sardis there were few, who did not follow the trend. There were a few in Sardis who had not spoiled or defiled their garments.

This brings us to Philadelphia. Philadelphia is a rare church indeed, the Words of He who is holy finds nothing to condemn in this congregation. Of the seven congregations in Asia Minor, only Smyrna and Philadelphia escape words of condemnation from the Lord. Smyrna, as you may recall gets its name from the word for Myrrh. They were a church that from the outside looked weak. They were a church that everyone assessed as being poor, but the First and Last who was dead and came to life declared them to be rich.

Philadelphia is the City of brotherly love. Phileo is one of the Greek words for love, and delphi is a root of the word brother. Jesus is presented to this church as He who is holy, and He who is true. He is also presented as He who has the key of David, and He who opens and no one shuts, and shuts and no one opens.

There is a word that is used in the description of our Lord in Revelation 3:7 that everyone uses, and very people do not know what it means? When I say we do not know what it means, I think that

probably half or more of the people who are here could give me the correct answer as to what it means to be holy, but I also think we have not thought through the implications of what that word means.

To be holy means to be set apart, or to be separated for a purpose. For example, when Moses stood in the presence of the burning-bush he was told to take off his shoes because the ground he stood on was holy. It was consecrated ground because the Lord was there. The entirety of the Book of Leviticus was about separating or setting apart what was common from what was holy. God's people have been identified throughout history using the language of holiness. In Isaiah 6, Isaiah is in the heavenly throne room of God and amidst all that is going on we see the Seraphim crying out one to another, Holy, Holy, Holy. God is above all, beyond all, and distinct from all of His creation. Of course this brings out another key to understanding holiness, and that is the ability to make distinctions. Another word for that is discernment.

We live in a day, where discernment or discrimination is quite often looked down upon. We have gotten so bad in our day and age that it is considered hate speech to refer to a person by something other than their preferred pronouns. Truth does not matter in today's age. But Jesus is presented to the Church in Philadelphia as He who is holy, and He who is true. In John 18:37-38 when Pontius Pilate is interrogating Jesus we read this interesting exchange?

³⁷ Pilate therefore said to Him, "Are You a king then?"

Jesus answered, "You say rightly that I am a king. For this cause I was born, and for this cause I have come into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice."

³⁸ Pilate said to Him, "What is truth?" And when he had said this, he went out again to the Jews, and said to them, "I find no fault in Him at all.

In John 14:6 Jesus declared Thomas: *"I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me."*

The irony of the statement by Pilate is that he is interrogating the living embodiment of truth, and he asks the question. "What is truth?" I have heard before, and I tend to believe it, that when Pilate asked his question, he was not asking for an answer. What he was doing was speaking the implications of his worldview. When you have a god for the sun, and god for the crops, you have several different fertility gods, and a god of justice, etc., etc., etc.. The ultimate casualty of such a world view is the truth. When Pilate asked Jesus, "What is truth?" he was saying... whose truth? The truth of Zeus? the truth of Poseidon? Because truth changed based on who you were talking to truth ceased to matter. We can mock this kind of view, but when a person speaks of "my truth." They are saying the very same thing. Truth does not change. There is not such thing as your truth, or my truth. There is only truth and Jesus is the way the truth and the life. Jesus is holy and Jesus is true.

He is also spoken of in this passage as having the key of David. Now, not surprisingly, holiness and truth are two subjects that the Bible spends quite a bit of time speaking about. Jesus is also presented as He who has the key of David. Along with this is the statement that He is "*He who*

opens and no one shuts, and shuts and no one opens” The statement key of David does not appear nearly as often as holiness and truth, and so we must dig a little to find what is being spoken of. How often does the expression Key of David appear in the Bible? The answer is twice. Here in Revelation 3, and it also appears in Isaiah the 22nd chapter. In Isaiah 22, God is bringing an accusation against a royal steward for falsehood. The Steward, who is supposed to work for the King, or for God has instead betrayed this trust.

Listen to these words from Isaiah 22:19-23:

*19 So I will drive you out of your office ,And from your position he will pull you down.
20 ‘Then it shall be in that day, That I will call My servant Eliakim the son of Hilkiah;
21 I will clothe him with your robe And strengthen him with your belt;I will commit your responsibility into his hand. He shall be a father to the inhabitants of Jerusalem And to the house of Judah. 22 The key of the house of David I will lay on his shoulder; So he shall open, and no one shall shut; And he shall shut, and no one shall open.
23 I will fasten him as a peg in a secure place, And he will become a glorious throne to his father’s house.*

Just like the Church in Smyrna, the Church in Philadelphia was undergoing persecution from what is called the Synagogue of Satan. I find it interesting that the two churches in Asia Minor that had no condemnation brought against them were both mentioned as being troubled by the Synagogue of Satan. The Synagogue of Satan was the unfaithful and apostate Jewish Synagogue. They were unfaithful because they rejected the Messiah. We know this because of the overwhelming testimony of the Scriptures. These people could probably trace their lineage back to Abraham. They claimed to be Jews, but according to the text they were not. One of the earliest New Testament Scriptures about these unfaithful Jews is found in the Gospel of Matthew

Chapter 3. John the Baptizer is in the wilderness and he is preaching the kingdom and calling people to repent and his teaching attracts many of the Pharisees and Sadducees. Listen to verses 7-9:

⁷ But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, "Brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? ⁸ Therefore bear fruits worthy of repentance, ⁹ and do not think to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' For I say to you that God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones.

There was a presumption by these Pharisees and Sadducees that because of their natural lineage being from Abraham, that they were the inheritors of the promises of God. We have already looked at the way Jesus dealt with them in the Gospel of John, he referred to them as children of their father the devil. But to who then is the promise given? The Bible tells us plainly that through Abraham and his seed or his offspring the world would be blessed. But the Apostle Paul makes it very clear to who this promise is speaking of. In Galatians 3:16 Paul writes: ¹⁶ *Now to Abraham and his Seed were the promises made. He does not say, "And to seeds," as of many, but as of one, "And to your Seed," who is Christ.* All of the promises of God are yes and amen in Christ Jesus.

Listen to the Gospel of John Chapter 1 verses 10-13 speaking of the Word that was made flesh:

¹⁰ He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him. ¹¹ He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him. ¹² But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: ¹³ who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.

The Synagogue at the time of Christ, and here prior to the fall of Jerusalem was full of wicked men who had rejected the Messiah. They were living in presumption that because of their physical descent from Abraham that they were the heirs of the kingdom. But John the Baptizer, and all of the Apostles and yes Jesus Himself told them that they were mistaken and here in Revelation we learn that they had become a Synagogue of Satan.

With all of that being said though, one of the characteristics that this Synagogue also possessed was the ability to cast people out of the Synagogue and prevent them from gathering.

In John Chapter 9 Jesus heals a man who had been born blind. This miracle or this sign should have been something that everyone rejoiced over, but instead of rejoicing the Pharisees were irate because Jesus had healed him on the Sabbath Day. Listen to verse 16 of John 9:

Some of the Pharisees said, "This man is not from God, for he does not keep the Sabbath." But others said "How can a man who is a sinner do such signs." And there was a division among them. As the chapter goes on the man who was healed has his parents brought before the Pharisees and they are put to the question. Rather than answer that their son had been born blind and been healed, they told the Pharisees, *"Ask him, he is of age."* And this is great, because the text tells us why they answered this way. In verse 23 we have the parenthetical statement that says *("His parents said these things because they feared the Jews, for the Jews had already agreed that if anyone should confess Jesus to be the Christ, he was to be put out of the synagogue.")*

The end result of the matter takes place in verses 24-34.

24 So they again called the man who was blind, and said to him, "Give God the glory! We know that this Man is a sinner."

25 He answered and said, "Whether He is a sinner or not I do not know. One thing I know: that though I was blind, now I see."

26 Then they said to him again, "What did He do to you? How did He open your eyes?"

27 He answered them, "I told you already, and you did not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you also want to become His disciples?"

28 Then they reviled him and said, "You are His disciple, but we are Moses' disciples. 29 We know that God spoke to Moses; as for this fellow, we do not know where He is from."

30 The man answered and said to them, "Why, this is a marvelous thing, that you do not know where He is from; yet He has opened my eyes! 31 Now we know that God does not hear sinners; but if anyone is a worshiper of God and does His will, He hears him. 32 Since the world began it has been unheard of that anyone opened the eyes of one who was born blind. 33 If this Man were not from God, He could do nothing."

34 They answered and said to him, "You were completely born in sins, and are you teaching us?" And they cast him out.

The passage ends with the man that Jesus healed being cast out of the Synagogue. The Jewish Synagogue had become a great enemy to the faithful in many cases persecuting them even to death, and in the best cases by simply driving them out. Jesus is telling the faithful, that I have the key of David, and these imposters will be cast out.

8 “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. 9 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.

All of the promises of God are yes and amen in Christ Jesus. This means if someone is looking at anything else for their salvation or for their deliverance they are looking in the wrong place.

The question becomes, are you in Christ? The members of the Synagogue, the unbelieving Jews have rejected Christ and they have literally become a Synagogue of Satan. There are some who want to differentiate between different sects of Judaism, but the question is always, “What do you believe about Christ?”

Listen to what David Chilton says here: *there is no such thing as “orthodox” Judaism; there is no such thing as a genuine belief in the Old Testament that is consistent with a rejection of Jesus Christ as Lord and God. Those who do not believe in Christ do not believe the Old Testament either. The god of Judaism is the devil. The Jew will not be recognized by God as one of His chosen people until he abandons his demonic religion and returns to the faith of his fathers – the faith which embraces Jesus Christ and His Gospel. When Christ-rejecting Jews claim to follow in the footsteps of Abraham, Jesus says, they lie. And, although they currently have the upper hand in Philadelphia, their domination of the true covenant people will not last long. Christ Himself will force them to come and bow down at the Christians’ feet.*

Something else that should encourage us in this passage is that Jesus has the Key of David.

There is no closed door, that Jesus cannot open. There are many times in the flesh when we are discouraged because everything around us looks bleak or dark, but we must remember that it is

Jesus who holds the key. We must learn to trust in Him, and trust in His Word, and prepare to see doors opened.

Philadelphia was not a prominent and strong church, at least not in the eyes of their neighbors. Their reputation in that city, was that they were small and weak. It says in the text that they have a little strength, but their true strength is revealed in their relationship to the Lord Jesus Christ. I find it interesting that the church immediately after Philadelphia, the Church of Laodicea has the reputation that they are strong, but Jesus tells them they are nothing. Philadelphia is in name, weak, but Jesus tells gives them nothing but encouragement.

Just like the man who had been born blind and was healed by Jesus was brought into conflict with the Pharisees, the relationship that this church had with Jesus was going to bring them into conflict with the Synagogue of Satan. When you learn to place your trust in Jesus this does not mean the end of your problems, however it does change what side you are on. If everyone thinks you are great, but the one who holds the key is not on your side, you are still in prison. The difference between the Laodicean Church, who trusted in their own sufficiency and the Philadelphian Church who had nothing and trusted in Christ is all of the difference in the world.

The last part of verse 9 says that those who are of the synagogue of Satan would be made to come and worship before the feet of the members of the church of Philadelphia. What this means is that they will be forced to acknowledge the covenantal status of the Church as the inheritor of the promises to Abraham and Moses. For the Church, in Christ, is the true Israel. Listen to what Hebrews 12:22 says to those who are in the church: *But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels,*

Apostate Israel has been pruned out of the tree of life of the covenant people, while believers in Christ from all nations have been grafted in. This is the message of Romans Chapter 11. The only hope for those outside the covenant line, regardless of their ethnic or religious heritage, is to recognize Christ as the only Savior and Lord, submitting themselves to Him. Unless and until the Jews become grafted into the covenant line by God's grace, they will remain outside the people of God, and will perish with the heathen. The last verses of Romans 11 speaks of the physical descendants of Abraham returning to faith in Jesus Christ, but until that happens, they are classed with the heathen. There is one major difference though, they have been entrusted with the Words of the living God and have rejected it.

10Because 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.

The Church in Philadelphia has obeyed the Lord's command to persevere and they are told they will be kept from the hour of tribulation that is coming upon the whole world to test those who dwell on the earth. This verse is often sited as a proof text for the pre-tribulation rapture of the Church. I mentioned last week that dispensationalists see a rapture in Chapter 4 of Revelation. Of course to do this they have to take everything out of context. They see the hour of trial as the 7-year tribulation, but let me ask a simple question. How is the faithful church, in actual Philadelphia. to be encouraged that Jesus will rapture the faithful saints of God 2000 years from now before the Great Tribulation comes upon the earth?

The message was that there was coming a great trial upon the land. Jerusalem, and Israel were soon to be wiped out by the coming trial. The Roman Empire was going to undergo cataclysmic

upheaval, and amazingly in Philadelphia the church was spared much of the destruction that was cast on everyone else.

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

The statement Behold, I am coming quickly is what we call a time text. The Book of Revelation is full of them. We have spoke of this in the past, and of course we will surely talk about it again, the text is speaking about events that are soon to take place. The deliverance and protection of this Church would have little meaning if it was speaking about events many millennia in the future. Jesus is telling them that the promised judgment on Apostate Israel and on Imperial Rome was coming. There are some who insist that the word has to do with immanence, and yet this teaching robs any significance from the passage. This coming in judgment is not about the rapture, it is about deliverance for His faithful people who are persevering.

The church in Philadelphia, as we have mentioned does not have great material or financial assets, in the eyes of the world they are weak, but they are told to hold fast to what they do have so that no one can take their crown. In 1 Peter 2:9-10 the promises made to the nation of Israel in Exodus 19 are applied to the Church of Jesus Christ: *⁹ But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; ¹⁰ who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy.* Remember in Revelation 1:6 we are told that Jesus has made us kings and to His God and Father. The Kingdom of God is invading all of creation and they are told to hold fast and endure and not allow that crown to be taken.

12He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he shall go out no more. 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.

The promise to the overcomers in this Church alludes back to the Old Testament imagery of the temple. This image of the temple is a picture of our salvation in Christ Jesus. 1 Kings 7 gives us a description of several pillars in the Temple of God. The two most prominent pillars being the two at the entrance of the Holiest place. They were named Jachin and Boaz. These names mean He Shall Establish, and In Him is Strength. To be made a pillar in the temple of God, and to not wander anymore is a statement that the Lord has with strength established His people and made them into the House of the living God.

The Lord also promises to write the name of His God and the City New Jerusalem upon them. One of the things that often disturbs me about the way people read the Book of Revelation is that there are many who will spend countless hours studying the mark of the beast. I understand the fascination. But I want you to answer a question to yourselves. How often have you heard conversations about the mark of the beast and what it is? Sure it is scary, it sounds pretty irreversible, but I want to be clear, it is not a bar code or a microchip. It is the antithesis of the mark that God places on His people. In Deuteronomy 6 a passage which the Hebrews call the Shema Israel, because the first Hebrew Word here is Shema or a command to hear we read, and please pay special attention to verse 8: ⁴ *“Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one!”* ⁵ *You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength.*

⁶ “*And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart.* ⁷ *You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up.* ⁸ ***You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes.*** ⁹ *You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.*

Revelation 22:4 speaks of the ones who have overcome as seeing His face and His name shall be on their foreheads. The ones who overcome here in verse 12 will have the name above every other name written on their forehead.

They will also have on them the name of the city of My God which is New Jerusalem. One of the themes we often miss is that the heavenly Jerusalem that is seen throughout the Book of Revelation is a city that comes down from God. We miss the significance of this statement if we see this as a physical city that, and I quote “hovers over the earth.” That quote was a statement a certain home school curriculum. What we must see here is that when the people of God gather in Jesus name, they are as we say most every Sunday truly worshipping in the heavenly places, in the very midst of the blessed Trinity with the Saints of all the ages, from every tongue, tribe and nation prepared to worship in the beauty of holiness. They are doing this because the New Jerusalem has come down from heaven and has invaded the earth.

Now text closes with the words: “*He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.*” ’

I have closed many of our messages to the churches with these words from the text, but I want to point something out that is significant. We are commanded to hear what the Spirit says to the churches, not what the Spirit says to the church. Why is that significant? The letters to the seven

churches were given to all seven of the churches. That means that although Philadelphia had nothing negative said about her, the warnings to every other church still applied to Philadelphia. This may seem obvious, but if you were a member of the Church in Philadelphia who had overcome many of the trials of persecution and suffering, but if over time you left your first love, you still had a problem.

This is why we must also pay attention and hear what is said to each of the churches. There are warnings and there are blessings, but if you have an ear please do listen, but most importantly, truly hear?