



Sermon Series: The 8th Letter
August 28, 2022
CHRIST FIRST CHURCH

Sermon #5:
The Church at Philadelphia
Revelation 3:7-13

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INTRO: Turn your Bibles, or turn them on once again, to Revelation chapter 3. Today, we'll begin reading at v 7. This is the seventh week in our series on the seven churches of Revelation.

(PUT UP MAP) As you can see behind me, we are making our way through Asia minor. We started in the port city of Ephesus, then made our way up to Smyrna. From there we journeyed northeast to the city of Pergamum, stayed there for a short visit, then traveled southeast to Thyatira. Last week we continued our southeast trek and came to the city of Sardis, and what an interesting place we found there. A church full of dead men's bones! But thank God there were a few faithful believers left, and God made to them some great and awesome promises.

Today, the Holy Spirit has led us to the beautiful city of Philadelphia. Philadelphia was named after it's founder, Attalus Philadelphus, King of Pergamum. It is situated 25 miles south/southeast of Sardis. The city is still in existence today, and is called Allah Shehr. It is interesting to note, and worth repeating that the churches of Philadelphia and Smyrna are the only two churches without rebuke from Christ, and they are the only two cities that have continued since the time of John up until today.

Philadelphia was located in the very fertile Cogmas River Valley. It was an agriculturally prosperous region, but the area was subject to frequent earthquakes. In AD 17, the city was nearly destroyed by a severe earthquake. Aftershocks made the city almost uninhabitable for several years. The ancient writer Pliny thought that the earthquake was one of the greatest disasters in human history. Because of the earthquake, Emperor Tiberius relieved the city of taxes/tribute for five years. The survivors rebuilt and the church went on. Today, the Christians of Allah Shehr have 25 places of worship they can choose from, five of them large churches with property and buildings. READ WITH ME...

Revelation 3:7-13 *"To the angel of the church in Philadelphia write: These are the words of the One 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, which no one can shut. For you have only a little strength, yet you have kept My word and have not denied My name. 9 Look at those who belong to the synagogue of Satan, who claim to be Jews but are liars instead. I will make them come and bow down at your feet, and they will know that I love you. 10 Because you have kept My command to persevere, I will also keep you from the hour of testing that is about to come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth. 11 I am coming soon. Hold fast to what you have, so that no one will take your crown. 12 The one who overcomes I will make a pillar in the temple of My God, and he will never again leave it. Upon him I will write the name of My God, and the name of the city of My God (the new Jerusalem that 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."*

Notice...

LETTER INTRODUCTION: v 7 *"To the angel of the church in Philadelphia write: These are the words of the One 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."*

Here, Jesus once again affirms His deity when He says of Himself, I am *"holy and true"*. That statement is altogether unique. No one else who has ever lived has been able to say that of themselves. NO ONE! Only Jesus!

Let's break this down some. Jesus says first of all that He is "holy". Holy is the Greek adjective, *hágios*. It's literal meaning is, "Different or unlike" That speaks of standing out from the world. But the definition continues, to be holy also means, "physically pure, morally blameless, or ceremonially consecrated." These definitions speak perfectly to Jesus. BUT, it's also what God's Word commands Christians everywhere to be.

2 Corinthians 6:17 *"Therefore come out from among (the world) and be separate, says the Lord. Touch no unclean thing, and I will receive you."* **1 Peter 2:9** *"But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people; that you should show forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvelous light."* We are called out, consecrated, to be different than the world. That's what we're meant to be!

Jesus, not only calls Himself *"holy"* (*hágios*), He also calls Himself *"true"* (*alēthinós*) *alēthinós* means "absolutely true, veracious, sincere, the opposite to what is fictitious, counterfeit, imaginary, simulated or pretended." Jesus is TRUTH! He doesn't just tell the truth, He is truth. In **John 14:6**, *"Jesus answered, 'I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.'" When we talk about Jesus being TRUTH, it's important that you understand the fullness of that statement. TRUTH is an intrinsic, or absolute as some would say, attribute of God, meaning it's part of who He is. HE IS TRUTH.*

God has both INTRINSIC and RELATIVE attributes. Intrinsic attributes are those things that belong solely to God. It's who and what He is. For example, the Bible tells us in **1 John 4:8**, that *"God is love."* He doesn't just love people, HE IS LOVE! Just like He is TRUTH. Now, Relative attributes are those that allow God to relate Himself to His creation. So, we say God is love, but when He relates love to mankind we experience it as mercy, grace and compassion. And we see the same thing with His TRUTH. When God relates truth to His creation, we experience that truth in His dependability, reliability, and His FAITHFULNESS. Jesus is absolutely trustworthy because He is TRUTH. Hebrews 6:18 tells us that *"it is impossible for God to lie."* He is truth! The only question left is, DO YOU BELIEVE HIM? When God says, He is a very present help in trouble. Do you believe Him? When He says He will never leave you nor forsake you, do you believe Him? God is Holy and True!

v 7 *"...These are the words of the One 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."*

The key indicates the governmental authority of David. He is the promised king Who will rule from the throne of David. Jacob prophesied that a ruler would arise from the tribe of Judah(Gen. 49:10). Isaiah prophesied of a coming child with an eternal kingdom that would rule from David's throne (Isa. 9:6-7). Gabriel repeated this promise to Mary at the annunciation: Luke 1:32 *"He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David"*

LETTER INTRODUCTION: v 7 CONTINUED Then lastly we read that He is actively holding open the door such that no one can shut it. The thought here is that people must respond while the door is held open by God for once it is shut, there is no recourse for entry.

Let's look at the body of this letter for a few minutes. Notice...

I) THEY OBTAINED THE PRAISE OF GOD: vv 8-9 *"I know your deeds. See, I have placed before you an open door, which no one can shut. For you have only a little strength, yet you have kept My word and have not denied My name. 9 Look at those who belong to the synagogue of Satan, who claim to be Jews but are liars instead. I will make them come and bow down at your feet, and they will know that I love you."*

Jesus had given the church at Philadelphia a blessed and favored ministry, specifically that of an open door to the Kingdom of God. Meaning that people were coming to Christ through the evangelistic efforts and preaching of the gospel by this great church, and all while, in Philadelphia there were those who claimed to be "good Jews", but really belonged to the synagogue of Satan that were doing everything within their power to keep people away from this church and the doctrine of Christ.

Jesus said, "you have only a little strength", that reference is probably in comparison to the size and sheer number of those who belonged to the synagogue Jesus references. The Jews in Philadelphia were meeting in a fine building and these Christians were meeting from house to house. They felt small and inferior, but the Bible says they had "kept God's word and had not denied His name." And because of that JESUS WAS PRAISING THEM! Imagine that. Then Jesus says, "Look at those who belong to the synagogue of Satan, who claim to be Jews but are liars instead. I will make them come and bow down at your feet, and they will know that I love you."

Does the place your call to labor
Seem so small and little known
It is great if God is in it
And He'll not forsake His own

LITTLE IS MUCH WHEN GOD IS IN IT

Now notice...

II) THEY OWNED THE PROMISES OF GOD: vv 10-11a *"Because you have kept My command to persevere, I will also keep you from the hour of testing that is about to come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth. 11 I am coming soon."* Here, we have a major shift in thought. Jesus goes from the present day first century church at Philadelphia to the future church at Philadelphia which still exist, as we said earlier. Christians in Allah Shehr are still worshipping God, and persevering in a hostile environment. In the introduction I told you that Christians had 25 places of worship to choose from, 5 of which actually have buildings and property. Compare that however to the 45 mosques that cover the landscape and you will understand why Jesus uses the word persevere. Make no mistake, it's only because of the promise and protection of Jesus Christ to this church that they are still around today. Then Jesus says something we all need to take note of, "I will also keep you from the hour of testing that is about to come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth. 11 I am coming soon."

LETTER INTRODUCTION: v 7

I) THEY OBTAINED THE PRAISE OF GOD: vv 8-9

II) THEY OWNED THE PROMISES OF GOD: vv 10-11a CONTINUED

The hour of testing that will come upon the whole world, is a reference to the time of tribulation that will follow the return of Jesus Christ for His church, to take us away to be with Him.

There is considerable debate as to the timing of these eschatological events that will take place. Some think that the church will indeed go through part, or all, of what the Bible calls tribulation and great tribulation, while others interpret the Bible to mean that the church will be caught up by Christ and taken out of the world prior to this period of time.

When we come to these verses the debate typically centers around one word, the word "from". *"I will also keep you from the hour of testing that is about to come..."* The Greek word translated "from" is the little word "ek". The meaning seems to be clear enough. The word "ek" means, "out of, from, away from". That definition, in and of itself, offers a great deal of understanding. Yet the debate continues on whether or not, FROM means "out of" or "through" as some would say. SO REAL QUICKLY, there are some people that believe the church will GO THROUGH the tribulation period that takes place on the earth prior to Christ returning to set up His eternal Kingdom. That's their thought. And they have a few verses they can turn to. But others, myself included, believe that scripture is clear about the fact that Christ will return for His church prior to the time of tribulation and will take the church OUT and AWAY FROM the earth before the wrath of God is poured out upon the earth. And on that thought there has been a great deal of debate.

Let me point out that I think the debate can come to a close if we don't stop on the word FROM and we continue to read. It's not the word FROM we need to focus on, it's what God is saving us FROM that matters. And you have to be careful even here. So what does it say? *"I will also keep you from the hour of testing that is about to come..."* The word HOUR denotes a period of time. That changes everything! It's not that Christ is just keeping us FROM THE TESTING to come, it's that He's keeping us from THE HOUR of the testing to come. The church will not experience the testing, because it will be delivered from the HOUR, the moment, the time of the testing! The promise here, relates to the TIME of the testing, not it's effects. *"I will also keep you from the hour of testing that is about to come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth. 11 I am coming soon."* WHAT A PROMISE FROM GOD! And you can take that to the bank, because Jesus, who made the promise, is *"holy and true"*. NOW NOTICE...

III) THE OFFERED PRIZE OF GOD: v 11b "...Hold fast to what you have, so

that no one will take your crown." Jesus commands the faithful believers at Philadelphia to "hold fast" to what they had. The phrase, "hold fast" is a singular Greek word, "krateō" that means, "to hold fast, not discard, or let go" And it's a present tense imperative, meaning, "be continually holding fast!" Keep doing what your doing, and do it faithfully, *"so that no one will take your crown."* The Philadelphians were promised a prize for their faithful service. Someone once rightfully said, "God is no man's debtor." When you are faithful to Him, He rewards you far beyond your faithfulness!

God had promised the overcomers at Smyrna the Crown of Life. But here no specific crown is mentioned. Suffice it to say, whatever it is, it will be a honor to receive.

LETTER INTRODUCTION: v 7

I) THEY OBTAINED THE PRAISE OF GOD: vv 8-9

II) THEY OWNED THE PROMISES OF GOD: vv 10-11a

III) THE OFFERED PRIZE OF GOD: v 11b

Now notice lastly...

CONCLUSION: vv 12-13 *"The one who overcomes I will make a pillar in the temple of My God, and he will never again leave it. Upon him I will write the name of My God, and the name of the city of My God (the new Jerusalem that 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."*

We come to the end of this magnificent letter. Like with the others, Jesus promises something specific to the faithful followers. There is something to be said about being a faithful follower of Christ. I'm not talking about claiming Him as Savior, or claiming a particular church as your home and family. I'm talking about living a committed life to God. Faithfully serving Him and following His commands; starting with reading and studying His Word.

Say what you will about your relationship with God, but if you are not regularly reading the Word of God and hiding it's precious truths in your heart, you don't have a close relationship with Him. To have a right relationship with God, you must PRAY, you must READ YOUR BIBLE, and you must OBEY GOD'S COMMANDS. If you're not doing those three things, you're not where you need to be in your relationship with Him.

Let's finish up... Jesus told the overcomers, *"I will make (you) a pillar in the temple of My God,"* We don't know for sure what that reference is, but we can certainly appreciate the second part of this promise, *"and he will never again leave it."* This is quite possibly the most precious of all the promises to the overcomer, because it speaks of fellowship with the God. Never again we will be separated from His presence.

v 12b *"Upon him I will write the name of My God, and the name of the city of My God (the new Jerusalem that comes down out of heaven from My God), and My new name."* The written name indicates character and ownership. These will be owned by God and molded according to His character. They are "sons of God". In the Tribulation, the 144,000 Jews have the Father's name written on their foreheads which identifies whose they are and provides for their protection. Here, the name is recorded on all the redeemed in the eternal state. Revelation 22:4 *"they will see His face, and His name will be on their foreheads."*

Jerusalem will have a new name during the Millennium that we will associate with: Ezekiel 48:35 *"All the way around shall be eighteen thousand cubits; and the name of the city from that day shall be: THE LORD IS THERE"* And Jesus Himself will have a new name. This new name, which more than likely denotes a yet unrevealed aspect of the character of Jesus will be written on the overcomer as well. God loves changing people's names. He did it all throughout scripture. I can hardly wait for Him to give me my new name that once and for all distinguishes me with Him.

How exciting! I love how Jesus builds anticipation for that day. And when you read the book of Revelation that's what happens. We start anticipating and looking forward to His coming. No wonder John wrote at the end of this book in Revelation 22:20 *"He who testifies to these things says, "Surely I am coming soon." Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!"*