

The Seven Churches of Revelation

Revelation 3:7-13

“Philadelphia: The Little Church that Could”

Introduction

I went to Shoney's one morning this week to have the breakfast bar (stop judging me, I like bacon). I was sitting there minding my own business, when some grumpy old man behind me started in to an exhaustive rant to inform his poor wife (bless her heart) about just exactly what is wrong with America, or as he put it “Merica”. After thirty minutes or so of listening to his complaints and colorful solutions, illuminated by every four letter word imaginable, I wanted so badly to turn around and either tell him to tone it down, or even better, to straighten him out. I thought better of it, because I didn't want you all to be embarrassed, when you read in the newspaper about your pastor having a violent altercation at Shoney's (the things I do for you people!). So I kept silent. I will say this... the old curmudgeon almost ruined my breakfast. I say “almost”, because well... I still had bacon. But the whole thing got me to thinking as I drove home. What exactly IS wrong in America? Do you want to know what I think? I promise not to rant (or curse for that matter). I believe that the problem with this nation is that far too many of the people living here who call themselves “Christians” are not living their lives in a manner that brings honor and glory to Christ. That's what I think.

You see... one day, all of us who are Believers will stand before The Judgment Seat of Christ (**2 Corinthians 5:10**), and trust me, Jesus is NOT gonna ask us whether or not we believed in global warming, or if we opposed the liberal college professors who are brainwashing our kids. Believe it or not, He's not even going to ask us which political party we supported (I know, right? ...shocker). Jesus IS going to hold us accountable for living a life that brings honor and glory to Him. He IS going to talk about whether or not we actually made a difference for the sake of His kingdom. He IS going to ask us if we used the opportunities that He gave us to MAKE DISCIPLES! Those are the kind of questions that He will be asking. Now I don't know about you, but I want to have some really good answers! For you see, we have not been called to “clean out the pond”, but rather we have been commanded to catch fish OUT OF IT (**Matthew 4:19**)!

The Church at Philadelphia wasn't a big and powerful church. Jesus knew that they were small and weak (**vs. 8**), but they had never denied him, nor ceased in striving to obey His commands. He had not one negative thing to say about the church of Philadelphia (which literally means *brotherly love*). They were small, and yet, by His strength, they were mighty. Remember the old story about “The Little Engine That Could”? That little locomotive just kept pulling his load up the hill saying “I think I can. I think I can”. Well, the Church at Philadelphia was much like that little engine. Only, when they were bearing their heavy burdens, they did it with a mighty faith saying, “We know HE can. We know HE can”. Jesus uses SMALL things to do great works. He always has. He used a little boy's picnic lunch to feed a multitude. When He uses the “foolish things” to confound the wise (**1 Corinthians 1:27**), the glory always ends up going exactly where and to whom it belongs! Christ alone is worthy of all praise. Apart from Him, we can do nothing. A church that is successful will go in His strength and not in their own flesh. They will be a church much like Philadelphia. I want Freedom Fellowship to be a church like that. I want that, because I know that this is what Christ wants for us.

The city of Philadelphia was named for its founder Attalus II, whose nickname Philadelphus (*brother lover*) was given to him because of his deep devotion and loyalty to his brother, King Eumenes of Pergamum. The city was established as an outpost for teaching the surrounding areas about Greek culture and the Greek language in the hopes of “making all the world Greek” (Hellenism). It is interesting to note that this was the vision of Alexander The Great, who wanted to have all the world speak one language and be under one banner. Though it did not happen as he had hoped, it did pave the way for a vast majority of people to understand the New Testament, which was written in Koine Greek. God used the Alexander's attempts to “Hellenize” the world to spread the gospel message of the saving grace of our LORD Jesus Christ. Our God is an awesome God indeed. Brotherly love is a perfect description of the small church that was established in Philadelphia, for Jesus had commended them for obeying his commands, which according to Christ is the very proof that we love him (**John 14:21**).

Jesus introduces Himself to the church as **“He who is holy and true” (vs.7)**, as well as, **The One who holds the key of David**. These are references to the fact that Christ is both God and The Messiah (we will discuss this further momentarily). He wanted them to know that through their weakness, He is strong. He will see to it that the church will overcome, so long as, they remain faithful to Him and His teachings. He encourages them with the absolute truth that although they have little strength, He will EMPOWER them, ENDORSE them, EXEMPT them, and EDIFY them.

Empower

When Jesus tells the Philadelphian believers that He **“holds the key of David”**, this is actually an Old Testament reference to a steward named Eliakim (**Isaiah 22:20-25**). Eliakim being the steward of the kingdom held the “key of David”, meaning that he had the keys to the rooms containing all the treasures of the kingdom. This is a messianic foreshadowing of Christ, for as a descendant of David, Jesus has access to all the treasures of The Kingdom of God. In other words, there is no power in heaven to which Jesus does not have access. He has the authority to say who can come in and who cannot, as well as, the authority to empower any servants of the kingdom that He so chooses. There were those of the Jewish faith in Philadelphia who despised the church and persecuted them as heretics and apostate, but Christ alone would have the final say as to whom He would grant access into Heaven, to whom was accepted or rejected. He assured the church at Philadelphia that they were His and had nothing to fear.

He also promised to **“open doors for them that no one can shut” (vs. 8)**. This simply means that based upon His authority as to holding the key of David, Jesus would see to it that the church would have opportunities to share the gospel. The city had been established as an attempt to “make the world Greek”, but Christ had established the church there to “get the world saved”! He would empower them to make a difference, to bloom where they had been planted. They need not worry. They could rely on His strength to make a lasting difference, to bear **“fruit that will last” (John 15:16)**. Do you want to make a difference for Christ in this wicked world? Then stay connected to Him, as they did in Philadelphia, and HE WILL OPEN DOORS FOR YOU! You will not have to worry about being effective, you just will be. Why? Because Christ will open the doors for you that no one can shut. That’s why!

Everything in Christianity really goes back to **John 15**. **If we abide in Christ, remain faithful and obey His commands, we WILL bear fruit. Apart from Him we can do nothing.** Just look at what He said to the church at Philadelphia, loosely paraphrased, “I know that you have no strength on your own, but you have obeyed my commands and have not denied my name. So I will open doors for you.” (**vs. 7-8**). The church of Philadelphia loved Christ to such degree they would NEVER think of denying Him, and they loved Him so much, that they strived to obey His commands, which is the living proof that their love was genuine. As a result, His spirit was within them. THEREFORE, they were guaranteed to be an effective witness for Him. THAT is exactly what Christ has required of ALL of his churches. To REMAIN in Him, so that they WILL bear fruit. This is what He wants from us at Freedom as well. With this in mind, allow me to ask you a few questions this morning. Are you passionately in love with Christ? So much so, that you live for the purpose of bringing glory and honor to Him alone? Are you filled with his Holy Spirit, so that He can enable you to live by His commands? If the answer to these questions is yes, then don't worry about making a lasting difference. You will. If the answer is no, then do you understand now why your life seems to be empty and without purpose? Surrender yourself to Christ and live to make a difference. Live for the glory of God! And when you do, then just wait and see what doors that He opens for you. He has promised to EMPOWER you!

Endorse

The non-believing Jews of Philadelphia had persecuted the church in the exact same way that the Jews in Smyrna had done to the church there (**2:9**). There can be nothing more humiliating than to be branded as a heretic. I once had a lady call me a false prophet, because I believe in the rapture of The Church. (For those of you who don't believe in the rapture, you have the right to be wrong, and I will try and grab you on my way up, but no promises! But I digress.) The Jews who refused to accept Jesus as their Messiah were incredibly hard on His Church, just as they had been hard upon Him. They had Him killed for his teaching. So, it should really come as no surprise when they tried to achieve the same result

for His followers. Jesus had warned the church that this would happen ([John 15:20-21](#)). May I make a rather bold and insensitive statement this morning? If you have never been persecuted for taking stand for Christ, then it is quite possible that you have never taken much of a stand. Truth can be painful sometimes. Rest assured, if you intend to live your life as a "Jesus Freak", then somebody will get pretty upset about it. If you're an "undercover brother", then you probably won't draw much fire from the enemy. (Just a bit of free insight there). Jesus has commanded us to be his witness throughout the earth ([Acts 1:8](#)). Obey that command, and it won't take long for you to discover a little persecution. Philadelphia had had its share, but they had refused to back down an inch in their devotion to Christ. That's what true love does.

As a result of their unwavering devotion, Jesus promised that He would one day make those Jews who had mistreated his church to come and bow down before it and acknowledge that they were indeed loved by The Almighty God. The word that Christ uses for "fall down at your feet" is *Proskuneo* in the Greek. It is a word that is used for "worship" in the New Testament. Imagine the humility of all those pious Jews, who thought that they were actually doing God a favor by persecuting His church, having to one day BOW DOWN in a posture of worship before that same Church! Oh my, THAT will be a sight to behold, and we who believe in Jesus will all be there to see it. What a sad day it will be for all the Islamist and Secular Humanist, and so many others, who have despised the true followers of God, when Christ Forces them to bow down before His Church and acknowledge that they had it right all along. They will be forced to admit that He (GOD) has loved the church. Of course this will occur AFTER they will be forced to bow down before HIM and proclaim that He is indeed LORD to the glory of God The Father ([Phil. 2:10](#)). So, on the bright side, at least their knees will already be limbered up prior to bowing down before The Church. Point being: JESUS WILL PUBLICLY ENDORSE HIS FOLLOWERS! All those who have mocked and ridiculed us for our faith will one day, sadly, learn the hard way their terrible mistake, but it will be too little and too late. One thing is for certain, I long for the endorsement of Jesus Christ! How about you? Just Imagine how sweet it will be to hear Him finally say, "[Well done, good and faithful servant](#)" ([Matt. 25:23](#)).

Exempt

Jesus promises the Church at Philadelphia that not only will He empower and endorse them, but that he will exempt them from the "[hour of trial that is going to come upon the whole world](#)" ([vs. 10](#)). What does he mean by the hour of trial? He is speaking of the seven year tribulation period that will occur in the last days. He promises that The Church, because of it's patient endurance, will be EXEMPT from the tribulation. Do you know how He plans to do that? Wait for it... HE will RAPTURE The Church! We, as Believers in Christ, have not been appointed to suffer wrath ([1 Thessalonians 5:9](#)). There is a dark day coming upon this earth, when it will be ruled in it's entirety by the Antichrist. He will be both brutal and persuasive, as he forces people to either worship him as god... or die. There will be plagues from heaven poured out upon the earth as one final push for those who do not believe in Christ to turn to Him before it is too late. The nation of Israel will finally realize that the same Jesus that they crucified is the true Messiah, and they will turn to him at last and find salvation ([Zechariah 12:10](#); [Romans 11:26](#)).

Though The Church has been persecuted throughout the ages, there will be no need for them to endure the suffering of the tribulation, for it's sole purpose is to be a wake up call for the lost. It has been called in the *Old Testament*, the great and terrible day of The Lord ([Joel 2:31](#)). It is also called "[The day of Jacob's trouble](#)" ([Jeremiah 30:7](#)), for the nation of Israel will suffer mightily, but it will cause them to turn to Christ and be saved. The tribulation period will last for seven years and will be absolute hell on earth. It is interesting to note that The Church is spoken of in [Revelation 1-3](#), but is not mentioned again until [Chapter 21](#) of the book. This is because [Chapters 4-20](#) deal with the tribulation, and The Church will NOT be on the earth during this time. Jesus has promised to those who remain in Him, that He will EXEMPT them from the tribulation. If you are happy about this fact this morning say TRUTH! The Church has been persecuted by many, but it will never be persecuted by Christ for being faithful to Him. We are The Bride of Christ, and our "husband" is not a wife beater. Of that you can be certain. God will punish His children for their sins, but He most certainly will NOT punish them for their faithfulness! Remain in Christ and be EXEMPT from the wrath of God that is to come.

Edify

Jesus promises the church that he will make them a **"pillar in the temple of My God"**. Think about that for a moment. This church that was weak in its own strength would be built up into something strong. A pillar is a huge part of the support structure of a building. It helps to hold the massive weight of the roof system. Those who remain in Christ, though they are weak, will one day be made strong! I am reminded of Simon Peter's words describing the church:

As you come to Him, the living Stone—
rejected by men, but chosen by God and precious to Him—
you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood,
offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

1 Peter 2:4-5

You see, The Church does not consist of the buildings in which we gather. The Church is the PEOPLE of God being built-up together to form a holy tabernacle. I love Peter's analogy. Jesus had changed Peter's name from Simon (meaning *"to hear"*) to Peter (meaning *"little stone"*). Don't miss this. Once Simon "HEARD" and believed the gospel message of Christ, his name was changed to "little rock", and he was placed upon the foundation of the Chief Corner Stone, Jesus. Peter was forever changed by Christ. That's why he got his new name. When we remain in Christ, then we too will be forever changed and receive a new name (new character), and we will become part of the mighty number of living stones being EDIFIED (built-up into a holy temple of God). We go from paupers to pillars! If that doesn't get you fired up this morning, then I don't know what else to say! Jesus wants to take you, in all your weakness, and build you up in his strength, so that you can be a pillar in the House of God. Don't use the excuse that you have little strength. Jesus will BE your strength, or as The Apostle Paul said, **"I can do ALL things through Christ WHO STRENGTHENS ME" (Phil.4:13)**. Jesus wants to build you up this morning. He wants to use you in a mighty way for the kingdom. He wants Freedom Fellowship (like Philadelphia) to be the "little church that COULD"!! I want that too! Who is with me?

And ALL of God's people said... TRUTH!