

**Christ's Messages To The Seven Churches Of
Asia;
Part 5—Message To The Church In Philadelphia:
*The Church With An Open Door***

Scripture reading: Revelation 3:7-13

7 “And to the angel 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, because you have a little power, and have kept My word, and have not denied My name. 9 ‘Behold, I will cause those of the synagogue of Satan, who say that they are Jews, and are not, but lie — behold, I will make them to come and bow down at your feet, and to know that I have loved you. 10 ‘Because you have kept the word of My perseverance, I also will keep you from the hour of testing, that hour which is about to come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell upon the earth. 11 ‘I am coming quickly; hold fast what you have, in order that no one take your crown. 12 ‘He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he will not go out from it anymore; and I will write upon 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.’

Opening Story: As many of you know, I grew up in San Diego, California. What you may not know, is that San Diego is a city that has suffered some pretty serious earthquakes. When I was around 10 years old, we were hit by a really powerful earthquake. The year was 1960, and the earthquake that shook our house and our lives was triggered by a massive 9.5 earthquake that ravaged Chile. I will never forget how violently our house shook. My mother was pregnant at the time, and when the quake hit she grabbed my brother Jimmy and my hands and pulled us to a small alcove under the stairway. I remember all three of us being huddled together, and filled with fear. After what seemed an eternity, the shaking finally stopped. All I can say is, that was one of the most frightening experiences of my life.

Intro: I share this story with you because Christ's next message to the church at Philadelphia was directed to a city plagued by frequent earthquakes. It is a remarkable fact of history that the church of Philadelphia remained longer than any of the other six churches Christ addressed. In fact, a Christian church exists in this city to this day. Again, this is especially relevant because the city of Philadelphia was regularly rocked by catastrophic earthquakes. History records that earthquakes destroyed the city several times. An earthquake in A.D. 17 was so severe that many residents of the city moved out and never returned.

In spite of the fact that the city of Philadelphia was built on such shaky ground, Christ commends the believers in the church at Philadelphia for standing firm for what they believed. The church in Philadelphia joins the church in Smyrna as being the only two churches to receive Christ's words of commendation for faithfulness, and no condemnation at all.

The church of Philadelphia represents the age of church history extending from 1750 to the present. This period is referred to as the Great Missionary Outreach Period of the Church. Christ says in verse 8, "I have placed an open door before you, which no one can shut." This open door, which refers to evangelistic efforts, will remain open to us until Christ comes on the clouds to Rapture the church home to heaven. More on this later.

The Church at Philadelphia is described as *The Church With An Open Door*

1. Destination of the letter (v. 7a)

v. 7a "And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write:

The city of Philadelphia was located 28 miles southeast of Sardis. The city was founded and built in 189 BC by the king of Pergamus, Attalus II Philadelphus. The name Philadelphus is similar to the Greek word Philadelphia, meaning "brotherly love." If you have ever attended or watched a sporting event in Philadelphia, you have no doubt observed that the people of Philadelphia have long since forgotten the meaning of their name.

Historically, King Philadelphus founded this city here because of its strategic location, and to carry out a specific purpose. As to its location, Philadelphia was situated where the borders of Mysia, Lydia and Phrygia met. This location served as an open door for the spread of Greek culture and language to the surrounding cities of Asia Minor, and to the lands beyond. King Philadelphus

envisioned this city as the gateway, *an open door*, between Rome and all the lands to the East.

In v. 8, the Risen Christ applies this concept of *an open door*, to the missionary endeavors of His church. He promises the believers in Philadelphia, and by way of extension, you and I, that He has placed *an open door* before us that no one can shut. Although Satan tries to thwart our efforts to spread the good news about God's love and forgiveness that He has made available through His Son, Jesus Christ, the door of Gospel witness remains open.

2. Description of Christ (v. 7b)

As in each of His previous letters, Christ begins this letter in verse 7b with a description of Himself, a description that is fitting for this church.

v. 7b "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:"

This description here in verse 7 is unique. All the other descriptions we have looked at are taken from the vision Christ gave John in Chapter 1. But this one is not taken from that vision. It has distinct Old Testament features. The Lord Jesus describes Himself in four ways.

First, *He who is holy*. Holiness is the preeminent character of God's nature. As the eternal Son of God, Christ is deity incarnate. He embodies holiness. The holiness of Christ is a frequent truth in Scripture, and as the Holy One, He is worthy to judge the spiritual life of the Philadelphia church. In addition, as the Holy One, He has every right to admonish His followers to live a holy life. The Apostle Peter exhorts believers in 1 Peter 1:14-16 "As obedient children, do not be conformed to the former lusts which were yours in your ignorance, 15 but like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all your behavior; 16 because it is written, "YOU SHALL BE HOLY, FOR I AM HOLY" (this quotation is from Lev. 11:44; 19:2).

Second, *He who is true*. Not only is Christ holy, He describes Himself secondly as *He who is true*. As God incarnate, Christ embodies truth. The translation of this Greek word means *authentic, genuine, or real*. In a world filled with lies, falsehood, and deception, ***Jesus Christ is the real deal***. I am

reminded of Jesus' words in **John 14:6** "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but through Me." Jesus is God's only provision for sin and death. If you have never accepted Jesus Christ as your Savior from sin and death, won't you receive Him today.

Third, Christ describes Himself as possessing *the key of David*.

In the vision in Revelation 1:18 Christ was describes as holding *the keys of life and death*. He alone has the power to grant salvation and victory over sin, Satan, and death. The reference here, to possessing *the key of David*, is a quotation from Isaiah 22:22, where it is used as a symbol of authority. King Eliakim, as a descendant of David, had the key of David, which granted him the right to rule, and access to all the treasures of King David. The Lord Jesus uses *the key of David* here to present Himself as the Sovereign Lord and heir of David's house and throne. It looks forward to Christ's glorious Messianic Kingdom and rule on earth. (2) It also reminds us of His royal authority, and the sovereignty He possesses over heaven and earth even now (Matt. 28:19).

David Jeremiah writes: "Jesus Christ possesses the key to holiness, to truth, to service, to opportunity, to testimony, and to evangelism. Even though the believers in this church were surrounded by paganism and idolatry, the Lord Jesus assures them that He has the key, which would open the door for them to effectively evangelize in His name." This leads us to our fourth point.

Fourth, *He who opens and shuts doors of ministry*. Christ describes Himself as the Sovereign and Omnipotent Lord. He is the One, who opens and no one can shut, and who shuts and no one opens." He is all powerful. No one can thwart what He wants to do. In the final analysis, Christ is the One who opens doors to effectual ministry, and at times closes doors also. The Apostle Paul learned this lesson first hand. Prior to coming to faith in Christ he was a zealous persecutor of Christians. On his way to Damascus, to arrest Christians, Paul was confronted by the Lord Jesus Christ, and saved as a result (Acts 9). As Paul and his missionary team were traveling through Phrygia and Galatia on his second missionary journey, the Holy Spirit prevented them from ministering in Asia. The Spirit directed Paul and his companions to cross over to Macedonia (Acts 16:8-10). The Lord closed the doors for ministry in Asia, but opened the doors for extensive ministry in Macedonia and Greece. Paul planted churches in Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea, Corinth, and Ephesus. On his third missionary journey, while ministering in Ephesus, Paul came to realize that the Lord had opened "a wide door for effective ministry" to him (Acts 19:10). The obvious lesson here is that we must learn to grab the Spirit-

directed opportunities that come our way, and never push against a closed door when the Lord isn't opening the door to us. **We need to pray and wait for Spiritual discernment and direction.**

3. Commendation (v. 8)

v. 8 "I know your deeds. Behold, I have put before you an open door which no one can shut, because you have a little power, and have kept My word, and have not denied My name.

Christ's commendation of these believers in Philadelphia is based on His knowledge of their faithful service. He commends them for four things:

First, Christ commended these believers for using the opportunities He had provided them. He provide them with an open door to reach the lost in their community and beyond with the message of God's love and forgiveness.

Second, even though they had but little power, they were effective. This may refer to the fact that these believers had discovered that the only true power for ministry comes from the Holy Spirit. The ability to witness and to lead people to faith in Christ is the Spirit's work from beginning to end.

Others believe this refers to the relative small number of true saints in the church. Charles Ryrie comments: the reference to "a little power, is not so much an indication of spiritual weakness as to the few true saints in the church" (*Revelation*, 29).

Third, Christ commends these believers for keeping His Word, and

Fourth, for remaining steadfastness in their Christian profession and service.

These believers, though lacking in numbers and resources, obediently kept Christ's Word and refused to deny His name. No matter what pressures were leveled against them, they remained faithful to uphold Christ's Word and Divine Person.

4. Promises (vv. 9-12)

Christ continues His message to the believers in Philadelphia by issuing

several promises in verses 9-12.

First, *their enemies would be humiliated* (v. 9)

9 ‘Behold, I will cause those of the synagogue of Satan, who say that they are Jews, and are not, but lie — behold, I will make them to come and bow down at your feet, and to know that I have loved you.

As in many Gentile cities, Philadelphia had a Jewish synagogue. As you well know, the synagogue refers to the place of Jewish worship and study. This synagogue was filled with Jewish devotees, who were directed and empowered by Satan. Christ promises these believers that He would humble these Jewish opponents. He would make them come and bow down at their feet, and He would let them know how much He loved these believers.

While this promise may have had a measure of fulfillment in John’s day, it will be fully realized in the future at **“*operation footstool*.”** Believers reigning with Christ in His future Millennial Kingdom, will be present as these persecutors will be made to fall down before Christ’s throne, and confess with their mouths that He is King of kings and Lord of lords, to the glory of God the Father (Phil. 2:10-11; Heb 2:13).

The second promise is recorded in verse 10: *Believers are promised deliverance from the wrath of God* (v. 10).

10 “Because you have kept the word of My perseverance, I also will keep you from the hour of testing, that hour which is about to come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell upon the earth” (Rev. 3:10).

The Lord Jesus promises to keep all true believers from the hour of testing which is to come upon the whole world. This “hour of testing” is not referring to some local trial. It is referring to the worldwide Tribulation that John will describe in chapters 6-19. This is the same as Daniel’s Seventieth Week (Dan. 9:27), and the time of Jacob’s trouble described by Jeremiah as a future time of unprecedented judgment (Jer. 30:7). Christ referred to this same period in His Olivet Discourse in Matthew 24–25. Notice that Jesus does not say, “I will keep you *through* the hour of trial,” but “I will keep you *from* the hour of trial.” Jesus’ promise to deliver believers from the coming hour of trial refers to the Rapture, when Jesus will come on the clouds to catch up, to Rapture, all true believers to Himself (1 Cor. 15:51-58; 1 Thess. 4:13-18).

This verse supports a teaching known as Pre-Tribulationism. The belief that the Church, comprised of all true believers, will not go through the seven year Tribulation. The promise of Christ is that the church, all true believers, ***will be kept from*** this coming hour of trial. It should be noted that while the Church is mentioned 19 times in these first three chapters of Revelation, it is never mentioned after chapter 3 of Revelation, until you get to the very last chapter.

Of course not all agree with this interpretation. Others hold to a teaching known as ***Mid-Tribulationism***. Proponents of this view argue that Jesus will come back and take out His church halfway through the seven year Tribulation.

The problem with this view is it ignores the fact that the Tribulation is a seven year period that cannot commence until Anti-Christ makes a seven year peace covenant with Israel (Dan. 9:27). Paul informed the Thessalonian believers in 2 Thessalonians 2:3-9 that Anti-Christ cannot come on the stage of world history until the Restrainer is first removed. The Restrainer is understood to be a reference to the Holy Spirit's indwelling ministry in the hearts of believers. It seems clear from these references that the Mid-Trib view is untenable.

A third view, known as ***Post-Tribulationism***, believes that the church will be on this earth for the entire seven years of the Tribulation, and that Jesus Christ will not come back until the end of the seven years. Proponents of this view say that Christ will preserve believers ***through*** the Tribulation. He will keep them safe ***through*** the seven years of Tribulation. That is not true though, because we read in Revelation that many who come to faith in Christ during the Tribulation will be martyred. Many believers will lose their lives during the Tribulation. So, this view does not hold up to scrutiny.

The most natural meaning of Christ's promise to keep believers *from* the hour of trial, demands a Pre-Tribulation Rapture of all true believers to heaven before the seven year Tribulation on earth begins. Additional promises supporting the Pre-Trib view are recorded in **Rom. 5:9; 1 Thess. 1:10; 5:9.**

Third, Christ's return will be sudden (v. 11)

v. 11 "I am coming quickly; hold fast what you have, in order that no one take your crown."

Christ promise *that He was coming soon*, is a concept repeated often in the Book of Revelation. The thought is not so much that of coming soon but coming suddenly or quickly (cf. 1:1; 2:16). They were exhorted in the light of His imminent coming at any moment, to continue to hold on to what they have until He comes. As Christians we should always be ready for Christ's return, and live our lives in light of His soon coming. Jesus says, "Live your life in such a way that you are found faithful should I come back right now."

The final promises are recorded in verse 12,

Fourth, *Believers will be honored* (v. 12a)

v. 12 "He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he will not go out from it anymore; and I will write upon 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."

Believers will be honored. Everyone who overcomes will be made a pillar in the temple of God, and will not go out from it any more. This is a promise of eternal security. Philadelphia was constantly threatened with earthquakes, as we noted earlier. The believers in the church at Philadelphia were used to feeling insecure. The only parts of the city that would be left standing after a severe quake were the huge stone columns of the temple because they were stable. They were secure. Christ promises to permanently establish believers in His kingdom so that nothing will ever dislodge them.

Fifth, *Believers will be identified with and possessed by God* (v. 12b)

Christ promises to write on every believer God's name, the name of His city, new Jerusalem, and His new name. What Christ's new name may be no one knows, but the writing of a name signifies identification with, and possession by God.

5. Christ's closing exhortation (v. 13)

The letter closes in verse 13 with Christ's familiar exhortation,

v. 13 "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."

Christ admonishes His followers to hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

If you have never identified with Christ by faith, then you need to hear what the Spirit is saying to you this morning. Jesus is God's only provision for sin. He is the only One who can deliver you from the curse of sin, and the eternal death that follows. Receive Christ today, so you can be delivered from the wrath of God to come upon this Christ-rejecting world. Because believers have identified with Christ by faith, He will identify with us by Rapturing us to heaven prior to the Tribulation period, and He will write His new name upon us. Hallelujah, what a Savior.

Film Clip: *Rapture Event*

Closing words of Commendation to the Saints of Horizon Church:

- **Support of Gideons**
- **Support of K-Life**
- **Support of Missionaries**
- **Standing with Horizon Church—Uncompromising love for God and His Word**

Closing Prayer:

Benediction: