

# Sermon: The Church of Philadelphia

Text: [Revelation 3:7-13 ESV](#)

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**Introduction:** The city of Philadelphia means something like “city of brotherly love.” It comes from two Greek words *philos* and *adelphos* that translate literally love and brother.

William Barclay (pp. 158-160) does a great job of describing Philadelphia and some of her history. Philadelphia “was situated where the borders of Mysia, Lydia and Phrygia met.” It was a border town. It was founded with the deliberate intention that it would be a missionary of sorts for the Greek culture. Even though the town was known for the Dionysus cult, the church had no real indictment against it by our Lord. The Dionysus cult was active in the area because of the great vineyards that made use of the fertile volcanic soil in the area.

Philadelphia was decimated by the AD 17 earthquakes, but unlike the other 10 cities affected, they continued to suffer aftershocks and [v.12](#) becomes more poignant for the readers of this letter where it reads “<sup>12</sup>The one who conquers, I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God. Never shall he go out of it,” - no more running to the hills at the first notice of tremors. God is our protector physically, but even more importantly spiritually.

There are really no complaints against the Church of Philadelphia, only praise and encouragement. Wouldn't that be great to be said about us?

## I. A Letter from Jesus ([v.7](#))

[Revelation 3:7 ESV](#) <sup>7</sup> “And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write: ‘The words of the holy one, the true one, who has the key of David, who opens and no one will shut, who shuts and no one opens.’”

### A. The Holy One

Holy (ἅγιος) One has the idea of being *pure, separate* and *righteous*. [Isaiah](#) speaks of the holiness of Yahweh 30 times in his 66 chapters. One of the more memorable is found in [Isaiah 6](#) as Isaiah is called to be a prophet.

[Isaiah 6:1-3 ESV](#) <sup>1</sup> In the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and the train of his robe filled the temple. <sup>2</sup> Above him stood the seraphim. Each had six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. <sup>3</sup> And one called to another and said: “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!”

Jesus is separate from sin and fault, but he stays close to *repentant* sinners. One of the complaints about Jesus was that he associated with sinners while the Pharisees who called themselves the “holy ones” were called hypocrites, and were those who didn’t realize they needed a doctor, or that they were blind in not being able to see God, the Light of the world, in their very midst.

“Holy and True” are used together in [Revelation 6:10 ESV](#) <sup>10</sup> They cried out with a loud voice, “O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before you will judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?”

John, the Apostle, has no difficulty in referring to God and Jesus with the same descriptive language. Jesus is also called here:

### B. The True One

This word *true* ( $\alpha\lambda\epsilon\theta\iota\nu\omicron\varsigma$ ) can mean true, but also real, genuine, and not false. John uses this word frequently. Jesus said “I AM the *true* Vine. This is in the context of remaining in Christ who is the Vine who gives us life and the ability to be faithful and fruitful.

### C. The Authoritative One

Jesus’ claim of having the keys of “death and Hades” in [Revelation 1:18](#) is different here. This is “the key of David ([3:7](#)).”

Rienecker says this is a metaphorical expression indicating complete control over the royal household. Keys again are about authority and responsibility. This text in Revelation would be about the authority to admit people into the New Jerusalem, i.e. the City of David.

Barclay adds (p.161) “But behind this (text) there is an Old Testament memory. Hezekiah had a faithful steward called Eliakim, who was over all his house, and who alone could admit to the presence of the king. Isaiah heard God say of this faithful Eliakim: [Isaiah 22:22 ESV](#) <sup>22</sup> And I will place on his shoulder the key of the house of David. He shall open, and none shall shut; and he shall shut, and none shall open.

So here in Isaiah Eliakim becomes a type pointing to Christ. “As Eliakim’s power was equal to the king’s, so would Christ’s be equal to God’s.” - Beale, p. 285

## II. Commendations from Jesus (v. 8)

[Revelation 3:8 ESV](#) <sup>8</sup> “I know your works. Behold, I have set before you an open door, which no one is able to shut. I know that you have but little power, and yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name.

## A. The Church was faithful.

The church was given more responsibility (an open door, or opportunity). This “open door” had already been opened and with God’s help and strength they could walk through it. There are many ways to possibly interpret this “open door.”

1. It could be a missionary opportunity.

2. a reference to Jesus who John calls a door or gate in **John 10:7-9 ESV** <sup>7</sup>So Jesus again said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. <sup>8</sup>All who came before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. <sup>9</sup>I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture.

**way, truth and life**

And this is also in context to a thief or robber...

3. Messianic community where Jews are invited into a primarily Gentile church

4. A door of prayer that is always open

Like many of the parables on stewardship in the N.T. even though it has been a long time away for the Master of the servants, those who worked, watched and had His best interest at heart were rewarded and given even more responsibility. Like the *Parable of the Talents* in **Matthew 25:14-30 ESV**. Verse 19 - “now after a long time...”

## B. Jesus was aware of their condition.

1. They had little power.

You ever feel tired and want to give up? Jesus, says “persevere.” The Church can see the finish line and needs to keep on pushing. **Philippians 3:12-14 ESV** <sup>12</sup> Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. <sup>13</sup> Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, <sup>14</sup> I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

2. They had been faithful to the Word (Λόγος).

There are churches today that interpret the Word of God with a newspaper in their hands or try to placate the culture, never wanting to offend. If used properly, **II Timothy 3:16-17 ESV** <sup>16</sup> All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, <sup>17</sup> that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

### 3. They had not denied the Savior.

There certainly would have been opportunities to worship the Emperor of record. The town had changed its name twice to honor different Caesars. Those who remained faithful would have a new name of their Savior, Jesus Christ, given to them (v. 12).

### III. Promises from Jesus (vv. 9-10)

**Revelation 3:9 ESV** 9 Behold, I will make those 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 before your feet, and they will learn that I have loved you.

#### A. Jews will bow before you.

Jews must understand God's love includes Gentiles. The Jews in the community were acting like followers of Satan rather than Yahweh/Jesus. Instead of the Jews attracting others to God, it was the Gentile's doing the Lord's work.

Here is some interesting pieces of Scripture that speak to the people's enemies falling at their feet: **Isaiah 60:14 ESV** 14 The sons of those who afflicted you shall come bending low to you, and all who despised you shall bow down at your feet; they shall call you the City of the Lord, the Zion of the Holy One of Israel.

a spiritual home...

**Isaiah 49:23 ESV** 23 Kings shall be your foster fathers, and their queens your nursing mothers. With their faces to the ground they shall bow down to you, and lick the dust of your feet. Then you will know that I am the Lord; those who wait for me shall not be put to shame."

**Zechariah 8:22-23 ESV** 22 Many peoples and strong nations shall come to seek the Lord of hosts in Jerusalem and to entreat the favor of the Lord. 23 Thus says the Lord of hosts: In those days ten men from the nations of every tongue shall take hold of the robe of a Jew, saying, 'Let us go with you, for we have heard that God is with you.'"

what a reversal...

Now, even Jews will come to recognize that God is with the Church and they will know who are the real spiritual children of Abraham. **Romans 9:6-8 ESV** 6 But it is not as though the word of God has failed. For not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel, 7 and not all are children of Abraham because they are his offspring, but "Through Isaac shall your offspring be named." 8 This means that it is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children of the promise are counted as offspring.

**Chapter 11** speaks of inward circumcision.

**B. Patience will be rewarded.**

**Revelation 3:10 ESV** <sup>10</sup> Because you have kept my word about patient endurance, I will keep you from the hour of trial that is coming on the whole world, to try those who dwell on the earth.

**Question:** What is the hour of trial?

**Answer:** Persecution possibly from Rome, but something in *their* future. No matter, they will be kept from it (lit. “out of it,” *ek*). If this points to something beyond their lifetime, what is the value of the promise to them?

There are, however, principles in play here. Jesus never promises that His Bride, the Church, will not suffer - only that He will be with us through it all, in so-called “good times and bad.” He is not like the unfaithful spouse who gives up at the first sign of trouble, or the hireling who runs away at the first sign of danger. Jesus is faithful and true!

This coming suffering is more than likely physical, but not so much spiritually. The Church at Philadelphia trusts the Lord with their life into the Age to come.

Jesus had said about His followers: **John 17:15 ESV** <sup>15</sup> I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one.[a]

**Footnotes:** [a] John 17:15 *Or from evil*

**Note:** **Revelation 3:10** and **John 17:15** are the only two places this τηρεω with εκο is used.

**IV. You Can Protect Your Future (Crown) (vv. 11-12)**

**Revelation 3:11-12 ESV** <sup>11</sup> I am coming soon. Hold fast what you have, so that no one may seize your crown. <sup>12</sup> The one who conquers, I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God. Never shall he go out of it, 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 from my God out of heaven, and my own new name.

**A. Jesus is coming soon (suddenly).**

The word *soon* can also be translated “quickly.” Again one is a matter of time while the other is a manner of how something happens. “Sardis had been threatened by his coming; Philadelphia, because she had been faithful and had nothing to fear, was encouraged by his coming” (Summers, p. 123).

When Jesus comes back for His Church, there are promises to be kept as a result of her (our) faithfulness.

## B. The Faithful will receive a permanent home.

We are commanded to hold fast, persevere, resist temptation and represent our Lord well, SO THAT no one may seize our crown.

If we conquer evil through Jesus Christ, there is a permanency to our existence, like a pillar in the temple of God. Now this pillar talk is a figure of speech and not meant to be taken literally. In fact, there is no “physical” temple in the New Age or life to come. Listen to what John tells us later in Revelation.

**Revelation 21:22-22:5 ESV** <sup>22</sup> And I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb. <sup>23</sup> And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and its lamp is the Lamb. <sup>24</sup> By its light will the nations walk, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it, <sup>25</sup> and its gates will never be shut by day—and there will be no night there. <sup>26</sup> They will bring into it the glory and the honor of the nations. <sup>27</sup> But nothing unclean will ever enter it, nor anyone who does what is detestable or false, but only those who are written in the Lamb's book of life.

## C. Newness awaits in how we are identified.

### 1. The Name of God will be written (branded) on us.

**Revelation 22:1-5 ESV** Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb <sup>2</sup> through the middle of the street of the city; also, on either side of the river, the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. <sup>3</sup> No longer will there be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him. <sup>4</sup> They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. <sup>5</sup> And night will be no more. They will need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever.

Here is Something you might hear at weddings as a benediction, but let us read one more verse farther. **Numbers 6:22-27 ESV** <sup>22</sup> The Lord spoke to Moses, saying, <sup>23</sup> “Speak to Aaron and his sons, saying, Thus you shall bless the people of Israel: you shall say to them,

<sup>24</sup> The Lord bless you and keep you;

<sup>25</sup> the Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you;

<sup>26</sup> the Lord lift up his countenance [face] upon you and give you peace.

<sup>27</sup> “So shall they put my name upon the people of Israel, and I will bless them.”

2. The name of the city of my God (New Jerusalem) will be written on us.

This is an indication of citizenship, our permanent residence, with no need to ever leave. Ezekiel talks about a recreated city of God in: **Ezekiel 48:35 ESV** <sup>35</sup> The circumference of the city shall be 18,000 cubits. And the name of the city from that time on shall be, The Lord Is There. **i.e., EMMANUEL**

3. The new Name of Jesus will be written on us.

Not much to tell here: **Revelation 19:12 ESV** <sup>12</sup> His eyes are like a flame of fire, and on his head are many diadems, and he has a name written (*on him*, NIV) that no one knows but himself.

**Conclusion:** Here again we hear a final word of encouragement and also a warning to “all” the churches. **Revelation 3:13 ESV** <sup>13</sup> ‘He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.’

Our Lord continues with His Word and Holy Spirit, and asks us to remain faithful to the end and be witnesses of His glory.