

TEXT SERMONS

SERIES: REVELATION CHAPTERS 1-3

Message #9

PHILADELPHIA

“THE CHURCH OF THE OPEN DOOR”

Rev. 3:7-13

John, the Postman of Patmos, delivers the 6th letter from the Lord Jesus Christ to the church located in the original city of Philadelphia. This letter, like the 5 which preceded it, are addressed to a particular church but they all have a message, not only for churches then but churches now.

Each letter concludes with the words: “He who has ears to hear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.” It is more than interesting that the Lord Jesus addresses His letters to the entire church in general but concludes His letters with an appeal to the individual: “*He* who has ears” Churches, of course, are comprised of individual believers and only as we hear individually can the church hear corporately.

We are reminded by James that we are to be “doers of the Word and not hearers only, deceiving ourselves.” Therefore, let us hear what the Holy Spirit says to the church in the city of Philadelphia, in what was then Asia Minor but is now in the country of Turkey. We begin by first looking at:

I. THE PLACE OF THE CHURCH.

v. 7 “And to the angel, (that is the messenger, the pastor) of the church in Philadelphia write....”

It is noteworthy that the only two cities that remain today are the two cities about which the Lord Jesus had no criticism; the two are Smyrna and Philadelphia. The city of Philadelphia was founded by Attalus the Second in 140 B.C. Attalus was also called “Attalus Philadelphos”. Philadelphos is the Greek for “one who loves his brother. “Philos” is a Greek word for “love or affection,” and “adolphos” means “brother”; so “Philadelphia” means the “city of brotherly love.” It was said that Attalus so loved his brother Eumenes that he named the city Philadelphos, thus Philadelphia and the meaning: “brotherly love”.

A. Philadelphia Was A Frontier City.

It was considered a border town. It was the remotest outpost of Greek culture and civilization. Beyond Philadelphia were the wild regions and barbarian tribes.

Attalus built the city with the deliberate intention and official blessing of the government that it might become a missionary city – not to spread the gospel but to spread Greek culture, language and civilization to the regions beyond. Attalus’ aim was that Philadelphia was to be the jumping off point to reach the barbarians in the regions beyond and convert them to everything Greek. His purpose was to preach the gospel of Greece, not the Gospel of Grace!

When we get to V. 8 we will see that Jesus refers to this open door for the Gospel of Grace.

B. Philadelphia Was A Center Of Heathen Worship.

It was called "Little Athens". You remember Paul's sermon preached on Mars Hill in Athens recorded in Acts 17? He said, "Men of Athens! I see that in every way you are very religious. For as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: TO AN UNKNOWN GOD." (Acts 17:22-23 NIV)

Philadelphia was literally called "Little Athens". The most prominent temple was to Baccus, the god of grapes. The area was a great grape growing area due to the fact that it was a volcanic area and the soil was conducive to growing grapes.

C. And Then, Philadelphia Was A Dangerous City.

Philadelphia was located in an area where there was tremendous volcanic activity. Earthquakes were frequent. In fact, Strabo, the ancient geographer, said of it "It is a city full of earthquakes." In 17 A.D., during our Savior's lifetime on earth, it was completely destroyed by an earthquake, but was rebuilt.

With this historical background about the city, perhaps we can appreciate the church more. Let us turn our attention now to the church. Notice the Posture of Christ:

II. THE POSTURE OF CHRIST.

Rev 3:7 "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."

By approaching the church in this posture, the Lord Jesus demonstrates 3 attributes:

A. The Attribute Of Deity: "He that is holy."

"Holiness" is the attribute of God alone. Christ introduces Himself as the "Holy One," a familiar Jewish title for God. In Isaiah 43 God declares, "I am the Lord, your Holy One, the Creator of Israel, your King." And "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts," was the anthem which Isaiah heard in the temple. (Isa. 6:3); Throughout the Old Testament God is called "The Holy One". And now that title is claimed by the Risen Christ, the Head of the Church.

The Greek word translated "holy" is "*hagios*" and means "different, separate from evil." God is holy because He is different from humans in that He is sinless, pure and cannot be otherwise. That quality belongs to Him alone which sets Him apart from all others. When Jesus declares that He is "holy" He is saying He is God.

B. The Attribute Of Veracity. "He who is true."

Veracity is that quality of being true, honest, accurate, genuine. The Greek is "*alethinos*" and means "Very God," as distinguished from the false gods who are of

“the synagogue of Satan” (v.9). Jesus said, “I am truth.” (John 14:6) He not only spoke the truth, He is Truth personified. In Him, we are confronted with Absolute Authenticity and Veracity. He approaches the Philadelphia church as The True One.

C. The Attribute Of Sovereignty. “He who has the key of David, He who opens and no one shuts, and shuts and no one opens.”

Behind this there is an Old Testament picture. King Hezekiah did not please God. He had a servant named Eliakim and Isaiah records that God told King Hezekiah that he would depose him and that Eliakim would become king. God said, “I will place on his (Eliakim’s) shoulder the key of the house of David; he shall open, and none shall shut; and he shall shut, and none shall open.” (Isa. 22:22) Eliakim was to have sovereign control over the kingdom. In this picture Eliakim is a type of the Lord Jesus. Jesus is the fulfillment in the absolute sense of what God said of Eliakim. In His hand is “the key of David”. Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of David, the King of Israel. The “key” is an expression that indicates sovereign control over the royal household of God.

Jesus is both the Door and the Doorkeeper! In Rev.3:7 we are told, “He who has the key ...” and in Rev.1:18 He said to John, “I have the keys of Hell and of Death.” He is the Door and He has the key! Jesus Christ is the Key that unlocks Heaven to believers and the Key that locks the doors of Hell upon unbelievers! Jesus is the Key Person and He is reminding the church in Philadelphia and us that He is in charge, He is the church’s Authority, He is the One Who opens the doors of opportunity, He is sovereign! Let us never forget Him!

III. THE PRAISE FOR THE CHURCH.

Rev 3:8 “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.”

Christ has the following compliments for this church:

A. He Praises Them For Their Performance.

v. 8 - “I know your works.....” This is a commendation but remember what He said to the Sardis church? “I know your works that you have a name that you live but you are dead.” That was a criticism.

Consider another assertion from C. S. Lewis: “The Christians who did most for the present world were just those who thought most of the next...It is since Christians have largely ceased to think of the other world that they have become so ineffective in this. Aim at heaven and you will get earth ‘thrown in’; aim at earth and you will get neither.”

Jesus was satisfied with the works they were performing in the Philadelphian church. Is He satisfied with ours? Have you ever heard the song, “I Am Satisfied With Jesus”? One verse is as follows: “I am satisfied with Jesus, He has done so much for me; He has suffered to redeem me, He has died to set me free. But the question comes to me as I think of Calvary: Is my Master satisfied with me?”

B. He Praises Them For Their Power.

“... for you have a little strength.” The word translated “strength” is “*dunamis*” in Greek and means “power.” This is the word from which we get our word “dynamite.” “You have some power” is what He is literally saying. “You have some power” - That is a commendation. A little power – a big potential!

C. He Praises Them For Their Practice.

“have kept my word”- The Greek is “*tereo*,” - “to guard from loss or injury by keeping the eye upon.” This does not mean that they stood watch over a book to keep it from being taken but that they kept the eyes of their souls upon the Word of God to practice it – they kept it in mind in the sense that they lived it!

Illust. I have had several boats and enjoyed boating, especially in the Puget Sound in the Pacific Northwest. I had a compass on board to aid me in keeping the boat on course. I did not stare at the compass all the time but frequently glanced at it to make sure that I was on course, and if not, to make a correction in order to arrive at the desired destination.

Are we daily watching the compass of the Word – and keeping our lives heading in the direction of heaven? Or, are we drifting aimlessly on the sea of life soon to suffer shipwreck?

D. He Praises Them For Their Perseverance.

“and have not denied My name.” Surrounded, as they were, by idols and heathen worship and opposed by what Jesus referred to as “the synagogue of Satan,” in v.9 – yet they persevered! In v.10 Jesus said, “because you have kept my command to persevere, I also will keep you....” He who keeps, will be kept!

Now, let’s go back to the middle of the verse 8 for one last word of praise:

E. He Praises Them For Their Potential.

“I have set before you an open door, and no one can shut it...” This statement is part of the praise Jesus gives to the church. He is talking about the potential that He has set before them. He did not say this to any of the other 6 churches. Why? None of them earned it! Here is “The Church Of The Open Door.”

The Christ of the Candlesticks has two open doors:

- *The door of salvation* - John 10:9 “I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved.....” (John 10:9);
- *The door of service*. The Apostle Paul tells the Colossian church, “pray for us that God may open a door for our message” (4:3).

John R.W. Stott, of England, Honorary Chaplain to the Queen, writes about the opportunity for service:

“Once inside the door of salvation, the believer’s eye lights upon another door which stands open before him. It is the door of service. And so, having gone in through the door of salvation, the new believer hurries out through the door of service to look for others and, in the words of Jesus, ‘compel them to come in.’

It is not possible to go through the second until we have entered the first. Will you come in? and then go out? ‘I am the door’, said Jesus; ‘if anyone enters by me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture.’”

And in this same vein, Mark Guy Pierce wrote: “Unless a man’s faith saves him out of selfishness into service, it will certainly never save him out of Hell into Heaven.”

It is the door of service that Christ is opening to the Philadelphian church. Why? Because He:

- Knew their works to be good;
- They had some power;
- They had kept His Word;
- They had not denied His name.

This is the kind of church that the Lord can trust with open doors of opportunity and ministry! And, where were they located? On the frontier - It was the remotest outpost of Greek culture and civilization. Beyond Philadelphia were the wild regions, barbarous and unevangelized tribes. What a door for evangelism and missions! This is the church of the open door, this is my favorite church of the seven. What potential for church planting! We have the same potential set before us in our world today. How many churches emphasize going global with the gospel? How many churches give and “go into all the world” as Jesus commanded in the Great Commission?

IV. THE PROBLEM IN THE CHURCH.

Like the church in Smyrna, there was no problem mentioned by the Lord Jesus. What a special privilege to be a part of such a church! Of course, the fact that the Lord Jesus does not cite any particular problem does not mean that the church was perfect. After all, it was comprised of human beings and there are no perfect ones of that species on earth!

V. THE PRESCRIPTION FOR THE CHURCH.

No problem – no prescription!

VI. THE PROMISES TO THE CHURCH.

There are two categories of promises: promises relating to earth and promises relating to heaven .

A. Promises Relating To Earth.

#1 Promise: *vindication*.

“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...” (Rev.3:9a)

#2 Promise: *verification*

“and to know that I have loved you.” (Rev.3:9b) This is not said of any other individual church body. We are aware that the Lord loves us personally, but does Jesus love our church for the reasons He loved the Philadelphia church?

#3 Promise: *visitation*.

“Because 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.” (Rev.3:10) I personally will keep you – “I will never leave you nor forsake you”; “I am with you always, to the very end.” This is the legacy of all those loved by the Lord!

B. Promises Relating To Heaven.**#1 Promise: *A personal return*.**

“Behold, I am coming quickly! Hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown.” (Rev.3:11) The phrase, “I will come quickly” or “I will come” occurs 7 times in the book of Revelation. (2:5,16; 3:3,11; 22:7,12, 20)

#2 Promise: *A priceless reward*. “He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God.....” (Rev.3:12) In the city of Philadelphia, the Who’s Who was not in a book but in a building, a temple. The nobility, the famous, had pillars erected in one of the temples in their honor. This was their Hall of Fame.

Illust. Have you ever been to the U.S. Capital in Washington, D.C.? In the rotunda are pillars with busts of prominent persons. That is similar to the pillars in the temples in Philadelphia. The Lord Jesus promises the overcomer a pillar, not in a heathen temple, but in the Heavenly Temple!

#3 Promise: *A permanent residence*.

“and he shall go out no more.” (Rev.3:12) Because Philadelphia was located on a volcanic fault, they frequently had earthquakes. As a result the citizens were unsure, unsafe and unsettled. When earthquakes occurred they ran out of the city to keep from being killed by falling debris and when the quaking was ended they would come back into the city. They frequently were going out and returning. Jesus was saying, in my Heavenly City there are no earthquakes – *and* no Heaven quakes either! You will be safe and unshaken for all eternity.

#4 Promise: *A public recognition*.

In Philadelphia, when a pillar was erected in honor of one of its citizens, the name of his god and the name of the city where his god originated was inscribed on the pillar. Since they had no newspapers, magazines or TV, This was a way to give public recognition. In 17 A.D. an earthquake totally destroyed the city of Philadelphia. The Roman Emperor, Tiberias, suspended the paying of taxes and sent financial aid to Philadelphia. In gratitude, the residents changed the name of the city to Neocaesarea – “The New City of Caesar”. Later, the name “Philadelphia” was restored. The people of the city knew what it meant to receive a new name.

“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 out of heaven from My God. And I will write on him My new name.” (Rev.3:12)

Illust. Almost everyone has heard the band music of John Philip Sousa, including his well-known march, “Stars And Stripes Forever”. His father came to America from Portugal. His original surname was “So”. He also was a musician and gave concerts across America. When John Philip Sousa’s father first came to this country he came by ship and wrote on all his baggage: “Mr. So - USA”. His fame as a musician preceded him and when his ship arrived some members of the press met him and saw on his luggage the words, “Mr. So - USA”. Newspaper articles began to appear announcing concerts by this musician from Portugal – Mr. Sousa. Mr. So was such an admirer of America, the new name pleased him and he adopted his new name, Mr. Sousa, feeling it identified him with the new country that he loved – and the name stuck!

You and I will have a new name some day! I don’t know what it will be – but we will share it with Jesus because He said, “I will write on him My new name.”

CONCLUSION

Philadelphia, the church of the open door. What a joy this church must have been to our Lord! May we, in our churches, take advantage of the open doors of opportunity all around us and all around the world.

Illust. In 1854, off of Lime Rock Light House located at Newport, Rhode Island, a boat with four men capsized. Mr. Lewis, the keeper of the lighthouse, was not at home at the time and his wife was ill. Ida, their 12 year old daughter, looked out upon the tempestuous waves and saw the four men clinging to the capsized boat. She got into a small boat and went to their rescue. She reached the men and they were saved from a watery grave. In the years that followed, she rescued nine others, making a total of thirteen persons that she rescued from drowning in her lifetime.

That is the work of the church corporately and the Christian individually - to rescue the perishing, care for the dying and point them to Jesus the mighty to save! He has a special love for the church that fulfills its mission in the world. I believe the Philadelphia church would have loved to sing the song, “Rescue The Perishing” if they had known it. Let us not only sing it but put feet to it!

“Rescue the perishing; duty demands it.
Strength for your labor the Lord will provide.
Back to the Narrow Way patiently win them,
Tell the poor wanderer a Savior has died.”

***“To Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever.
Amen.”*** (Eph.3:21)

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