

TO THE CHURCH AT PHILADELPHIA

Revelation 3:7-13

Intro: In our text for today, we move east and a little south from Sardis about twenty-five miles to Philadelphia. It was built originally by a king named Attalus Philadelphus from whom the city got its name. A little over a hundred years before Christ it was taken over by the Romans, and it was then that it became a part of the Roman Empire. In Smith's Bible Dictionary he said that the original population of Philadelphia was Macedonian, but it is apparent from our Lord's letter that there were Jews in the city, who were hostile to the Gospel, and yet, among whom there was evidently a mighty work of God by which they were turned to Christ and to the church. Its present name is Allah-shehr which shows the strong influence of the Moslem population.

There is much evidence of the sovereignty of God in this letter, and we need to include its very name in that evidence. It is made up of two Greek words which mean *the love of brothers*, or as the city of Philadelphia, PA is often called, *the city of brotherly love*. So it seems providential that it was a part of the purpose of God that people would be saved in that city and brought into the family of God.

But we are interested in which the church there was like in the days that the Lord led the Apostle John to write down His letter for them. To do that we need to consider the letter verse by verse. But, as we have seen in the other letters, we have another major reason for reading and studying this letter, as well as the other six letters in Revelation 2 and 3. That reason is the application of what the Lord said to those believers in Philadelphia in those days which can be helpful to us today, both by way of warnings as well as encouragement.

The pattern is much the same as the other letters, but there are some minor differences.

The letter is addressed to the angel of the church at Philadelphia. But by now we realize that the angel was to the divinely appointed leader of the church, the Pastor, whose responsibility was to deliver the message of the epistle to the church at Philadelphia.

Then in the latter part of verse 7 we have the Lord described, but not as in the previous letters. Here it is as we see the Lord in Scripture, both before

He became a Man, and during His ministry in the flesh on earth.

In verse 8 we see the Lord acquaintance with the church in Philadelphia.

In verse 9 the Lord's prediction by way of promises as to what the church can expect to see regarding a change that will take place among many of their enemies, the Jews.

In verse 10 the promises of the Lord continues, but this is in the form of a reward concerning their faithfulness to the Word of the Lord.

Verse 11 contains another promise along with the Lord's instruction as to what they were to do while waiting for that promise to be fulfilled.

Verse 12 has to do with the overcomer. The very length of this verse shows that spiritually the church at Philadelphia showed great promise for the future because of their remarkable history in the past.

The letter closes in verse 13 with the familiar appeal the Lord has used in all of the preceding letters, and which He will use again in the letter to the church at Laodicea which follows.

Now let us look at the letter in greater detail.

I. THE ADDRESSEE AND THE WRITER (Rev. 3:7).

What a responsibility the pastors of these churches had! These letters were dictated by our Lord to the Apostle John. He was to write exactly what the Lord told him to write, and it was the pastor's responsibility to deliver the message exactly as it was given to John. Many of you will remember the warning with which this book of the Revelation closes about what will happen to those who either add to, or take away, from the words of this book. We need to be just as careful today about the way we handle the Word of God. We do not receive any added revelations such as the Apostle John did. We have the completed Word of God. And so with regard to all of the Word, our responsibility, and the responsibility of every true church of the Lord Jesus Christ, is to preach and teach the Word of God, from Genesis to this book of the Revelation of Jesus Christ, *just as it is!* I have no right to change any of it, nor do you, nor does anyone else. And we are not to take up time which is to be devoted to the exposition of Scripture to talk about anything else. If the pastors of

churches throughout the history of the church had been faithful to their calling, the church would be in much better condition today. I repeat what I have said before, the pastor is not called to entertain. He is called to preach, to declare, to explain and apply, the Word of God – and let me say what I have said before: nothing more, nothing less, nothing else!

And this comes from none other than our absolutely “holy” Lord Jesus Christ, Who is the “true” and only “true” God, the absolutely sovereign Savior, Who came to earth as a descendant and an heir of David, only greater than David, with “the key of David” which He uses to open doors that no man can shut, and to close doors which no man can open.

There are lots and lots of preachers who by the methods that they use are continually trying to open doors, open doors to people’s hearts. They have forgotten (if they ever knew) that that is not their job. That is the Lord’s job. It is our job to preach the Word; it is the Lord’s responsibility, and only His, to determine when and where and how and with whom His Word is to be used. We do have a responsibility to pray that the Lord will open our hearts and the hearts of those who hear, but only God can open anyone’s heart to the Word of God. I hope we all understand this.

But let us move on in our text. Look with me at verse 8.

II. THE LORD’S KNOWLEDGE OF HIS WORK IN PHILADELPHIA (Rev. 3:8).

He knew their works. But He wanted them to know that He had opened the door that had been opened to them. And with all of the opposition that they were facing especially from the Jews, the Lord wanted them to remember that He had opened it, and that no man could close it, even though he might be the most powerful rabbi in the city.

By way of comparing the total power and influence of the church, their strength was obviously small, yet they had been faithful to the Word of the Lord, and to the Name of the Lord. The “little strength” that was in the church (because it was from the Lord), was greater than all of the Satanic forces that were at work to close down the church, or at least to silence its message. Those are the two points upon which every church needs to be faithful – to the Lord’s Word and to the Lord Jesus Christ Himself.

So in the light of all of this, what was the Lord going to do?

III. THE LORD'S PROMISE OF A SPECIAL WORK (Rev. 3:9).

Lit. what the Lord said here at the beginning of verse 9 is, "Behold, I will give ..." The Lord was going to make a gift to His church in Philadelphia from the synagogue in that city. This is very similar to what the Lord did when He saved Saul of Tarsus when he was on his way to cause trouble for the church in Damascus.

But notice how the Lord spoke of those Jews. They claimed to be Jews, that is, they claimed that they were the true people of God. But the Lord said that they were not His people. Instead He called them "of the synagogue of Satan"! They would have vehemently denied this charge. But the Lord always tells the truth. How tragic it is when people think that they are serving God when they are actually working against God!

What was the Lord going to do with them? He was going to "make them" come to the church, fall before the believers in the church, and actually recognize that it was the believers in the church who were the true people of God. They would recognize that those despised Gentile Christians were actually the people who were the objects of Christ's love. And they didn't know it, but some of those Jews were among the elect of God, and the Lord used this occasion as the very time that He would draw those Jews to Christ! What an amazing story! What a testimony to the power and grace of God! And yet this kind of a work has been done many times throughout the history of God's dealing with people.

Then the Lord made another promise to His people.

IV. ANOTHER SPECIAL PROMISE FROM THE LORD (Rev. 3:10).

The Lord said that His people had "kept the Word of" His "patience." What did He mean by this expression? Well, let me tell you what I think that it means.

Have you ever noticed (and I am sure that you have) that the Lord rarely answers our prayers immediately when we pray them? Prayer calls for both faith and patience. Often it seems like the promises of God are not true because we pray, claiming them, but nothing happens. But the

Writer of the book of Hebrews has given us this word:

11 And we desire that every one of you do shew the same diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end:

12 That ye be not slothful, but followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises (Heb. 6:11-12).

They had persisted in believing the Lord even when the opposition seemed to be invincible. They were sure that God would stand by His Word, and that He would not stand idly by while the enemies of the Gospel destroyed the church.

And so what was the Lord going to do for them? He was going to keep them from “the hour of temptation,” or the time of testing, that was going to come upon the whole world. This can only mean that He was going to take them to heaven before the Great Tribulation got started.

Judgment awaits the whole world, and we can see that the world is hastening toward that time right now. Very little serious attention is now being given to the voice of the church today. The attention that is given, is opposition and rejection. But the day is coming when the world will be forced to realize that the message of the Gospel with its warning of eternal death as well as its hope of eternal life, is absolute truth.

But what is the church to do now with its “little strength” (v. 8) in the light of the world’s rejection of its message? Our answer is found in verse 11.

V. THE COMMAND TO THE CHURCH FROM THE HEAD OF THE CHURCH (Rev. 3:11).

This letter is full of promises, and here we have another promise, a great promise, which the Lord gave to precede His command.

It was over two thousand years ago that the Lord said, “Behold, I come quickly.” Such a promise after so long a time makes people respond like Peter said this will in the last chapter of his second epistle. Please turn to 2 Peter, chapter 3. (Read vv. 1-4, 8-13.) The Lord speaks from His eternal perspective, and so this means that, according to heaven’s way of keeping time, *our Lord has only been gone two days!*

And why is He waiting? It is until He has saved all that have been chosen for salvation. And so this means that the preaching of the Gospel even in

our day is anything but a waste of time.

What are we to do, then? Two things:

1) We are to continue preaching the Gospel, looking expectantly for the coming of the Lord. This is extremely important. But there is a second point that is equally important. And we find this in our text that we are considering today as well as in 2 Peter 3. (See 2 Pet. 3:11 and Rev. 3:11.)

2) “Hold fast that which thou hast, that no man take thy crown” (Rev. 3:11). Cf. also Rev. 2:25 and 3:3. God never has made a promise that He cannot keep, nor has He ever made a promise that He has forgotten. The words of men may fail, and often do fail, *but the Word of God cannot fail because it is the Word of God!*

And so two things remain. The first:

VI. THE LORD’S PROMISES TO THE OVERCOMERS (Rev. 3:12).

One thing that we obviously are to learn when we seem to be overwhelmed with discouragement, and ready to give up hope, is that we turn to the Word and feed our souls on the promises of God. We need His commands, but we also need His promises. Look at the list of them in Rev. 3:12.

Promise #1: “To him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God.” “A pillar” is for strength and for adornment. “A pillar” is unmoveable! “He shall go no more out,” evidently meaning no more broken fellowship!

Promise #2: I will write upon him three things:

- a) “The Name of my God,” the Lord Jesus is speaking.
- b) “The Name of the city of my God, ... new Jerusalem ...”
- c) “My new Name.”

Note the predominance of the word, “name.” For the Name of Christ’s God to be put upon His people suggests ownership. We belong to Him now, but the day will come when there will be no uncertainty about it before the eyes of men.

To have the Name of the city of my God upon us, will mean *citizenship*, as the Apostle Paul taught in Phil. 3:20-21. Today there are really only

two kinds of people in this world: those who are citizens of heaven, and those who are not. We can't really tell the difference by looking at each other, but in the day when the Lord comes there will be no question about it.

To have the Lord's "new Name," suggests again that we belong to Him, but it also suggests, since "name" means acquaintance, that we will enjoy a knowledge of the Lord, and a fellowship with the Lord, which has not been possible in this life. For those of us who know the Lord it is really true that "better days are coming," not through the Democrats, and not through the Republicans, *but through our Lord Jesus Christ!* His Name will not be new to Him, but new to us!

What glorious days are ahead for the people of God! Let the world despise us now. We have the Lord's amazing promises to look forward to in the days to come.

Now we come to that very important exhortation that we have had in all of the other letters:

VII. THE LORD'S APPEAL (Rev. 3:13).

This is the Lord's word for all of the seven churches in the Roman province of Asia, but it is also His word for every true church, every real believer, from that day until this, and on to the end of time. And what a tragedy it will be if any of us does not really hear the Lord's message in this letter to the church at Philadelphia, which is also meant for us! Pray that the Lord will enable you to hear it.

And, if you don't know the Lord as your Savior, pray that the Holy Spirit will take away your spiritual deafness, and enable you to hear these wonderful words of eternal life. If we really hear the messages to the churches, the evidence that we have heard will be seen in our lives.