

The Church in Philadelphia---The Church with an Open Door

Revelation 3:7-13 New American Standard Bible (NASB)

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 followed My word, and have not denied My name. ⁹ Behold, I will make those of the synagogue of Satan, who say that they are Jews and are not, but lie—I will make them come and bow down before your feet, and make them know that I have loved you. ¹⁰ Because you have kept My word of perseverance, I also will keep you from the hour of the testing, that hour which is about to come upon the whole world, to test those who live on the earth. ¹¹ I am coming quickly; hold firmly to what you have, so that no one will take your crown. ¹² The one 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 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 My new name. ¹³ The one who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.’

Introduction

A recap of the last six Sundays:

In the past six Sundays, Jesus taught us a few things through His letters to the five churches in Asia Minor: A. Hold onto His truth and defend the biblical truth against false teachings. B. Two things He hates in the Church: idol worship and sexual immorality. C. He calls for repentance in the Church (it is a healthy thing to do). D. Eternal life is promised to those who remain faithful to the Lord until death. E. The only way to revive a dead church is prayer and repentance. F. Your name has been written in the Book of Life before the foundation of the world.

Today, we are going visit another church in Asia Minor: the Church in Philadelphia.

Content

Background: The city of Philadelphia in Asia Minor was located 28 miles southeast of Sardis. Philadelphia means “brotherly love.” It is mentioned 6 other times as literal “brotherly affection and care among the believers” in the New Testament (Romans 12:10, 1 Thessalonians 4:9, Hebrews 13:1, 1 Peter 1:22, 2 Peter 1:7). In today’s text, however, ‘Philadelphia’ simply means the name of city.

The city of Philadelphia was small compared to the greater cities like Ephesus, Smyrna, and Pergamum in Asia Minor. However, due to its fertile soil, it was well known for "the vineyards covered the surrounding hills, and the head of Bacchus was imprinted on their coins."¹ It was famous in producing one of the best wines in the region.

Let's dig in. Verse 7.

Verse 7:⁷ "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:**

He who is holy, who is true: Christ declares Himself as the One who is holy, true and has the key of David. By doing so, He identifies Himself with nobody but God. As God the Father is holy and true, so is He. In fact, He is the second Person of Trinity. Christ is equal to God.

The Key of David: Christ has the key of David. The Lord God gave Him the throne of David (Luke 1:32). Christ has the authority over the house of Israel and over the entire universe. He also has the keys of death and of Hades (Revelation 1:18). Indeed, God exalted Christ and gave Him the name above all names. At the name of Jesus, "every knee will bow, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth,"¹¹ and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Philippians 2:10-11).

Who opens and no one will shut, and who shuts and no one opens: Christ is the Sovereign over all things. No one can restrain His hand and say to Him, "What have You done?" Concerning such divine sovereignty, the Book of Daniel testifies as follows: "For His dominion is an everlasting dominion, And His kingdom is from generation to generation.³⁵ All the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing; He does according to His will in the army of heaven And among the inhabitants of the earth. No one can restrain His hand Or say to Him, "What have You done?" (Daniel 4:34-35, NKJV).

Verse 8:⁸ "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 followed My word, and have not denied My name.**

An open door: Christ opens a door for the Church in Philadelphia that no one can shut. I believe it is the open door of evangelism. The open door for the Church to bring persecutors in as new converts. I will speak more about it later.

Speaking of closed and open doors, one pastor, Rev. Joseph Stowell, explains as follows:

In the city of Philadelphia, there was a synagogue of Jews. Obviously, the Jewish believers in Christ were not welcomed there, so the synagogue officials removed their names from their roster and kicked them out. Please keep in mind that in those days Jews were exempt from saying "Caesar is the lord." In other words, if you were registered in the rolls of synagogue, you didn't have to worship Caesar. So, when the synagogue removed the names of the believers, it automatically put them in jeopardy, because they were no longer exempt from Caesar worship. The synagogue shut its door to the believers and excluded them from fellowship. To such believers, Christ says, I am the one who has the ultimate authority to close and open the door for you. Even though the synagogue door was closed to you, and you were excluded from their fellowship, I will open a new door for you. You are welcome in my Church. You belong to Me. ²

A little power, followed My word (my translation would be 'kept' My word) **and have not denied My name:** One true story during the Korean War in the 1950s. E.g., In 1950, the communists in the North invaded South Korea and destroyed many villages. In one village, the communist army had all the villagers gathered in town square. The commander ordered them to be separated into two groups: Christians and the rest. He sent the non-believers home. The soldiers lined up the Christians. In front of the believers, the commander placed a portrait of Jesus on the ground. He ordered them to curse Christ, spit on his picture, stomp on it, and move on. "Those who do so will be spared from execution," he said. "Those who refuse to deny the Lord will be shot to death."

One by one, from the oldest to the youngest, some believers renounced the Lord, spat on Jesus' picture, and stomped on it. When it came to a boy (about 11 years old), he picked up the picture of Jesus from the ground and wiped the picture against his chest with tears in his eyes. Looking up to heaven, he prayed to the Lord saying, "Lord Jesus, I cannot and will not deny you." The commander was furious. He violently pulled the boy aside and dragged him to the outskirts of the village shouting, "I am going to kill you by myself." When the two were alone with no one around, the commander shot two shots into the air and whispered to the boy, "Now, run and go to the next village. I used to be a believer like you and today I saw you a genuine follower of Christ. Run!" The Lord Jesus spared the boy because he didn't deny the Lord. The rest of the believers who denied the Lord were shot to death. The boy with a little power kept Jesus' word and didn't deny Him in front of the people, and the Lord rewarded him by keeping him alive.

Verse 9: ⁹ Behold, I will make those of **the synagogue of Satan**, who say that they are Jews and are not, but lie—I will make them come and bow down before your feet, and make them know that I have loved you.

The synagogue of Satan, who say that they are Jews and are not, but lie: Jesus already mentioned the same sentence to the Church in Smyrna who was undergoing persecution and slanders by so called Jews: "I know your tribulation and your poverty (but

you are rich), and the slander by those who say they are Jews, and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan" (Revelation 2:9). In times of persecution and slander, we ought not to focus on the ethnicity of the persecutors. Instead, we ought to be aware of the real enemy behind persecutors---the devil.

I will make them come and bow down before your feet: Here, the Lord promises that He will bring some of the persecutors to faith---a sure sign of His love for His children. It reminds me of the story of Paul the Apostle. His former name was Saul who used to be the persecutor of the Church until Christ appeared to him on the road to Damascus and made him a believer. The Lord demonstrated His love for the Body of Christ by bringing this persecutor to the feet of the Church.

There is another story of a former KGB agent: "*The Persecutor, Sergei Kourdakov, a former KGB agent who persecuted Christians in the Soviet Union in the 1970s, but defected to Canada in 1971 and converted to Evangelical Christianity.*"³ Sergei was deeply moved by a Christian girl, Natasha, whom he had arrested and imprisoned. At first, he ridiculed her faith, however, the Lord touched his heart with Natasha's unwavering faith and courage. Soon, Sergei too became a believer in Christ. Throughout the history of Christianity, the Lord made countless persecutors come and bow down before the believers in Christ. Indeed, the Lord still surprises us from time to time by turning our worst enemies into best friends. Only those who remain faithful experience such a miracle.

Verse 10: ¹⁰ *Because you have kept My word of perseverance, I also will keep you from **the hour of the testing**, that hour which is about to come upon the whole world, to test those who live on the earth.*

The hour of the testing: Some scholars explain that it is the 7 year-Great Tribulation in the end times. This tribulation will come upon all those who live on the earth. Our question is: *How do we prepare for that?* As far as I am concerned, I know what to do. *I will keep Jesus' commands with perseverance, and Christ will keep His promise to keep me from the hour of testing.* Indeed, God will keep the believers who keep God's word with perseverance from the hour of testing as He promises. Let me say one more time. Those who keep Jesus' word to the end will be spared from the hour of the testing, and those don't will suffer from it.

Verse 11: ¹¹ *I am coming quickly; **hold firmly to what you have**, so that no one will take your crown.*

Hold firmly to what you have: Reminding the Church of His second coming, Christ commands the believers to hold firmly what they have so that no one will take their crown. We will lose our crown unless we hold firmly to Christ's teaching.

Verse 12: ¹² *The one 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 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 My new name.*

Christ promises those who overcome all temptations and trials. *Heaven.* The eternal presence before God the Father. They will be with the LORD God forever in His presence. Jesus will also write on them three names: the name of His God, the name of the new Jerusalem, and His new name. What a wonderful blessing it will be!

Verse 13: ¹³ *The one who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.'*

Once again, Christ leaves it up to us. The choice is yours. Listen, discern, and decide wisely according to Christ's commands.

Conclusion

Concerning the end time signs, Christ says in Matthew 24:9-13, "*they will hand you over to tribulation and kill you, and you will be hated by all nations because of My name.*" ¹⁰ *And at that time many will fall away, and they will betray one another and hate one another.*" ¹¹ *And many false prophets will rise up and mislead many people.*" ¹² *And because lawlessness is increased, most people's love will become cold.*" ¹³ *But the one who endures to the end is the one who will be saved."* We are living in the end times. It is inevitable for us to face trials and persecutions. Those who endure to the end will be saved. Jesus will keep those who do not deny Him before the people from the upcoming tribulation. He will write on them the name of His God, the name of new Jerusalem, and His new name. He will give them crown to wear. They will be in the presence of God forever and ever.

Amen.

End Notes

1. J. Vernon McGee, *Revelation Chapters 1-5* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1991), 100.
2. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LUsm9dZPrCY&t=9s>
3. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Persecutor