

What Jesus Says to His Church
Part 7: Philadelphia —the Faithful Church
Sermon Summary

Last month we began looking at the first three chapters of the spell-binding book of Revelation. Sometimes when we think of the book of Revelation, we think of God’s wrath, confusing symbols, and great tribulation. It’s full of beasts, bowls, trumpets, and torment. But *all of that* begins in chapter 4 of Revelation—and we’re just looking at chapters 1-3. *For now*—that is. If you ask Pastor Doug nicely, he may be willing to preach on the rest of Revelation for us sometime.

Let’s open our sermon study guides to the full-color center spread. Please raise your hand if you need one. Ushers are ready to bring you one. Revelation chapters 1-3 contain seven letters that Jesus wrote to seven churches in the region that’s now Turkey. In the center of your sermon study guide I’ve placed these seven letters side-by-side in seven columns, so we can more easily observe similarities and differences. Notice that little “key” there in the middle of the first column.

We’ve arrived at Jesus’ letter to the church of Philadelphia “Faithful Philly”. Let’s make a few general observations, and it’ll become obvious why Philadelphia deserves the designation, “faithful”. The first, most obvious observation, is that Philadelphia gets no rebuke. Zero. So Jesus clearly gives Philly a “thumbs up”. No church is perfect, so this highlights how gracious Jesus is. He could have found *something* to criticize, but they were doing all of the *important* stuff right, and that’s what Jesus cares about. Too often in our families, someone makes a huge effort—a husband to do dishes or car maintenance, a wife to manage the budget or chauffeur the kids to events, a child to clean up his room or do her homework unsupervised—and we find the *one* thing they missed, and we *point that out!* Don’t we? Jesus doesn’t. He’s gracious. That’s why I love him so much.

And notice how much *promise* they receive! More than *any other* church. Jesus is such an encourager. He’s a *promise-making* AND a *promise-keeping* God. We’re going to see some very sweet promises that were made to the church of Philadelphia. They can apply to us as well—if we follow Philly’s example.

So now, let’s listen to what Jesus says to his church in Philadelphia. You may wish to follow along, looking at the text as you listen. Jesus’ letter to the church in Philadelphia is found three fourths of the way thru your sermon study guide. You’ll hear some references to keys and doors. You’ll hear a bunch of promises Jesus makes. OK, let’s hear what Jesus said to his church in Philadelphia...

Philadelphia was a faithful, little church, and Jesus has nothing but congratulatory and comforting things to say to them. Let’s look at some specifics. In verse 8, Jesus said, I know your deeds—you have a little power, and have kept My word, and have not denied My name... and then, down in verse 10 Jesus said: and you have kept the word of My perseverance... “Little power”—that describes most of us, doesn’t it? We’re just ordinary people. A *few* of us may be considered “power-brokers” or “king-makers”, but most of us are just pretty average. I know I am.

It’s easy to agree that we’re not powerful people, but what about having “kept Jesus’ word” and not to having “denied his name”. Are we like Philadelphia? But once again, Jesus ends up being more gracious than we are. Think for a moment about Jesus’ twelve disciples. You remember how bold *they* were, don’t you? That bunch of tough guys ran away when Jesus was arrested and crucified— at the moment Jesus needed a friend, they were nowhere to be found!

Yet look at how Jesus describes them to the Father. The night before he was crucified, Jesus was praying to his Father, and said *this* about his disciples... I have manifested Your name to the men whom You gave Me out of the world; they were Yours and You gave them to Me, and *they have kept Your word*. “They have kept your word!” I often marvel at that statement. Jesus’ disciples were a bunch of block-heads! Like me! ...and like you. Yet Jesus’ gracious evaluation of them is that they had kept God’s word. Amazing!

So, Jesus described the church of Philadelphia as little, weak, and faithful. They had a lot in common with us. So, let’s see what Jesus promised them. Jesus opened his letter to Philadelphia, saying that he possesses the key of David, and that when he opens a door, no one can shut it. And when he shuts a door, no one can open it. Jesus is saying that he’s absolutely sovereign.

Then he tells the church of Philadelphia that *because* they are little, weak, and faithful, that he’s placed before him one of those open doors, which no one can shut. What is he saying? The Scriptures often use the image of an open door in reference to evangelism, and so Jesus is saying that he’s giving them a wide-open evangelistic opportunity. People in their city who have been resistant to them and to the gospel, will now begin to respond. Verse 9 says this...

Behold, I will cause 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 at your feet, and make them know that I have loved you. Do you recall, four weeks ago when we studied Jesus’ letter to Sweet Little Smyrna, that they had a similar problem of Jewish opposition to the gospel? Does that ring a bell? Jesus said the same thing back in his letter to Smyrna. He said that they were Jews in name only, that they didn’t really hold to the faith of Abraham, the father of the Jewish faith. And Jesus indicts them with those same stinging words, that they’re actually a “synagogue of Satan”! Ouch! It sounds like anti-semitism, but it isn’t really. I gave a full explanation of it when I spoke on Smyrna, so you can go to tcc.org and refresh your memory.

And here’s the promise Jesus made to the small, weak, but faithful Philadelphians: I will make them come and bow down at your feet, and make them know that I have loved you. Jesus promised the Philadelphians that he would add power to their faithful witness, and many of those who opposed them would respond to the gospel. Jesus promised to open a door of gospel witness for the church of Philadelphia that nobody could close. Jesus promised that many of them would be saved.

Sometimes it’s hard to want God to bless our enemies with salvation, but we have to remember: *we all* once were *God’s* enemies, and *we’re glad* that *he* pursued *us*. The believers in Philadelphia wanted even those who slandered and opposed them to experience the grace of God. The Scriptures say that this should be *our* attitude as well: Sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence...Keep your behavior excellent, so that in the thing in which they slander you as evildoers, they may, because of your good deeds, as they observe them, *glorify God in the day of visitation*.

To “glorify God in the day he visits us” means that they’ll be believers by the time Jesus returns. It means that even folks who slander us can be won to Christ— if we humbly suffer, keep our behavior excellent *even when theirs isn’t*, and gently and respectfully defend the Christian faith to them. It’s hard to want those who mistreat us to receive God’s mercy and forgiveness. But that’s exactly what

the faithful Philadelphians, were doing. So the question is—what is compelling enough to help *us* want even our oppressors to experience God’s blessing? There’s only one power sufficient for that: we must be so enthralled by the glory of God and the grace he’s shown us, that obedience to him is our life-goal. This will happen as we see Jesus more clearly and, as a result, love him with all our heart. So let’s study some of the insights about the Lord Jesus found in Revelation chapter 1 which show him to be worthy of our total reverence.

Revelation chapter 1, is toward the front in your sermon study guide right *after* the page full of maps.

Got it? Super. Let’s look down in this paragraph here and list all of the observations we can about Jesus. There are going to be a whole bunch of them. Why don’t you take your pen and underline them as we go along. Then, a little later I’m going to ask you to put a star beside one of them. Verse 5 begins: “and from Jesus Christ...” See that?

“Jesus” was his name. For the most part, we choose names for our children just because we like the sound of them. But Jewish names had rich meaning. “Jesus” means “God is salvation.” But the word “Christ” *wasn’t* a name, but rather his title. So you could say, “Jesus *the* Christ”. Christ means “anointed one”; it’s the Greek equivalent to the word “Messiah”. So, right off the bat, we learn that Jesus is God’s anointed messiah, the savior of the world, and that his very *name* means “God is salvation.”

Next, verse 5 calls him “the faithful witness”. Jesus was a faithful witness— he faithfully told us about what God is like, what mankind’s problem is, how it can be solved, and so forth. He did this faithfully in that he always told the truth, and he never failed to speak up, even when it cost him dearly. Like their Lord, the believers in Philadelphia also were faithful witnesses. We must be too.

Jesus is called the “firstborn from the dead”. In Jewish culture, the firstborn son was exalted above his siblings, so the term “firstborn” came to mean: “exalted above others”. So calling Jesus “the firstborn from the dead” is making the claim that Jesus is exalted above all of us who ever will be raised from the dead. He get’s this honor, of course, because he’s the one who conquered death for us.

Next, we learn that he’s the “ruler of the kings of the earth”. Jesus is king over all human kings, and lord over all human lords. He is the supreme commander of all. That includes Trump, Putin, and Gov. Cooper—you name it; Jesus rules them all.

Finally, from verse 5 we learned that he loves us and released us from our sins by his blood. He’s not just high and exalted, he’s near to us in love, and does for us what we most need—he releases us from bondage to our sins. And it cost him dearly to do this—he had to pour out his life-blood to free us. Hallelujah! And we saw how the church of Philadelphia had been given a wide-open door for spreading the message of forgiveness and freedom through Christ.

OK, let’s see what we can learn about Jesus in verse 6. Keep in mind that verse 5 called him the “ruler of the kings of the earth”. Kings have kingdoms, so Jesus has one too... And *we’re in it!* Verse 6 says that Jesus “made *us* to be a kingdom”. And it isn’t any rinky-dink, second-rate kingdom. Jesus is king over all the other kings of the earth, so his kingdom is over all of their kingdoms too. And we’re members of it.

This was a huge encouragement to the small, despised church in Philadelphia, and I hope it is to you, too. Does the media ever make fun of Christians? You bet it does! Does the Hollywood ever belittle us? We're the butt of many jokes. Christians are attacked for our beliefs, for our convictions, for a lifestyle that sometimes gets called "un-American" and "hateful".

The first century also was very hostile to Christ's followers, and as our culture becomes increasingly godless, it'll become ever more precious to us that our kingdom is not of this world. We've got a place in Christ's heavenly kingdom. "Jesus made us to be priests to His God and Father". A priest mediates between God and man. Jesus made us priests, so our job is to connect lost people to God the Father. The church of Philadelphia took their role as priests seriously. They reached out evangelistically to neighbors who were treating them very spitefully. That's hard to do, and they did it faithfully.

Jesus will receive glory and dominion forever. During his earthly ministry, Jesus was despised. No more. Throughout eternity, his glory will be on display and undeniable. In fact, the Bible says that *every* knee will bow and *every* tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. That includes even those in hell. They won't be *enjoying* Jesus' presence and blessing, but they'll be *acknowledging* it.

Jesus will receive "dominion" forever too. "Dominion" and "domination" come from the same root. Jesus will have eternal domination. That's *not* good news if you're his enemy. But it *is* good news *if* you have experienced Jesus' love and have been released from your sins by his blood. I hope that these truths are precious to you.

Right at the end of verse 6 there's one more truth squeezed in—but you may not have recognized it as such. See that word "amen"? We often use the word "amen" simply to mean, "I'm done with my prayer." But "amen" is an emphatic exclamation, an affirmation that means "It's true!" or "Let it be so!" John the Apostle, who wrote Revelation, says "You can take this to the bank!" Verse 7 has a few more truths about our glorious Lord.

Jesus is coming back. Don't you just *long* for that day?! Every day I'm ready to leave this achy old body and this divided heart behind. I've got lots of good things in this life, but I agree with Paul: to die now and go be with the Lord is very much better. Jesus is coming back!

Everyone will see Jesus when he comes back on the clouds. Of course, what will be a joyous experience for God's redeemed children will be a day of reckoning for those who rejected and killed Jesus. Oh my.

Those who rejected Jesus will mourn—literally "bewail" their choice. Brothers and sisters—we must share the gospel with our lost family and friends. Although Jesus permits folks to reject him, he *doesn't* permit them to escape the consequences of that choice. Now is their opportunity to make Jesus' return a joyous experience, rather than a woeful one. The church of Philadelphia is a great inspiration to us in their evangelistic zeal.

John says "amen" again—this is truly how things are going to be when Christ returns. Then in verse 8 he says... "I am the Alpha and the Omega". Alpha was the first letter in the Greek alphabet, Omega is the last—like our "z". Jesus is the "a to z". Which is just a poetic way of saying that he is the beginning

and the end. Then he restates it: “Who is, who was, and who is to come.” He’s just repeating himself to make sure we got it. Got it? We do not need to fear the future: the Alpha and the Omega already *knows* it and *owns* it!

All of the above description adds up to one thing: Jesus is almighty. “Almighty” comes from two words: “all” and “mighty”. *How* mighty is he? *All-mighty!* Down in the closing paragraph of Revelation 1, many of these same themes are repeated: Jesus says that he is the first and the last, the living One, who was dead and now is alive forever. But then he adds one new element: Jesus tells us that he has the keys of death and of Hades. Keys are a sign of authority. The person with the key controls access—and so we saw in the opening verse of this letter that Jesus opens doors that no one can shut, and he shuts doors that no one can open. We also saw that he placed an open door in Philadelphia.

Here we see that the doors Jesus controls extend beyond this life, to death and Hades. Jesus is saying that you and your loved-ones can’t die until he says it’s time. And, when he says it’s time, nobody stops him from opening that door! Similarly, “Hades”—the place where the lost go until final judgement—Jesus has the keys to hell as well.

Brothers and sisters— *this* is our Jesus! Remember I mentioned putting a star beside one of them. Now’s the time. Let’s take a moment now, quietly in our seats, to look over all of those things that you underlined about Jesus. Please choose the one that most warms your heart toward Christ, and put a star next to that one. Let’s do that now. Put a star next to the attribute of Christ that most draws your heart toward your Savior.

[Got it?] We took this extended time reminding ourselves of the glories of our Lord Jesus because the image that comes to mind when we think about God is the most important thing about us. A glorious view of Christ inspired the church in Philadelphia to good deeds and perseverance.

It can for us too. Our view of God shapes our goals in life. It cures us of fears—with God as my helper, why should I fear man?! The majesty of God fuels our faithfulness, and so now we’ll look at the final few promises Jesus made to the church of Philadelphia in response to their faithfulness. He promised to reduce the suffering they’ll experience, and soon enough to come for them and to put an end to all of their need for patient endurance. Jesus said: 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 on the earth. I am coming quickly; hold fast what you have, so that no one will take your crown.

Jesus promised to spare the believers in Philadelphia from having to go through the world-wide testing that others would experience. He promised this *because they had been* faithfully persevering. But notices that he said that it was important for them to *keep holding fast* to what they have. Jesus warned them that perseverance continues to be required of God’s saints. We never just “slide for home”.

Every day that we have on this earth matters, because we are either laying up more rewards in heaven, or forfeiting rewards we could have had. Here he calls them “crowns”. Faithful living really matters. John wrote this to another one of the churches in this same region... Watch yourselves, that you do not lose what we have accomplished, but that you may receive a full reward.

Getting *into* heaven, of course, depends on Christ's work, not ours. But receiving a *reward* in heaven depends upon our faithfulness and perseverance. It really matters how we live. Our eighty years on this earth are compared to a morning mist that burns off by lunchtime. Life really is short, but eternity is, well, *really long*. I'm 60, so I'm *mostly done* with this earthly life.

Of course, *any one of us* could in fact be 99% done—and not know it. I just received word that my cousin has stage 4 pancreatic cancer. This earthly part of life truly is uncertain, but the quality of our eternal experience doesn't need to be. The decisions we make during this earthly "brief morning mist" determine it all. If we repent and receive Christ as Savior, we'll be with him in heaven. And then, if we invest this "brief morning mist" in living for his glory, we'll lay up for ourselves a full heavenly reward.

Which brings us to Jesus' final promises to those in Philadelphia who overcome. 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 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.

You know what happens when ancient cities crumble. All that's left is pillars. They don't go anywhere! And Jesus says that our place in heaven is as stable as marble pillars. You can read about that in the *final* two chapters of Revelation. It's fantastic. Over-comers are promised a permanent place in God's presence.

But there's more. Have you ever had a possession that you wrote your name on? It could have been a tool that you lend, a jacket that you might lose, a crock-pot that you bring to a Community Group meal, or your last will and testament, that lists all that you've accumulated throughout your life. Why do we write our name on something? Because it belongs to us and we're committed to not losing it!

But have you ever written *your dad's* name, *your* name, *and your address* on a crock-pot? *I don't think so!* Well, Jesus writes *all of that* on us. He writes God's name on us. He writes the name of the heavenly Jerusalem on us, and he writes his new name on us. Question: Any chance we'll get misplaced? No. We are his, forever. God never loses a single one of his true children.

I hope that you stand amazed at—and love—our marvelous Savior as I do. When I think about all his graciousness toward us—

- praising *us* for *our* faithfulness, and overlooking our incidental flaws
- opening evangelistic doors for us that no one can close
- sparing us from testing that will come upon the world
- giving us uninterrupted access to the presence of God, and
- writing his name and address on us, so everyone knows we're his!

When I think about all his graciousness toward us, I love him even more!

Well, let's close by talking about what our response should be to our wonderful Savior.