

## **“THE CHURCH IN PHILADELPHIA.”**

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**Scripture Texts: Revelation 3:7-13**

### **Introduction**

What do you pay attention to? What do you keep track of or follow with interest on a very regular basis? The stock market, home values, the Seahawks or the Mariners, the Huskies or Cougars, the weather report, the police scanner, the news, a favorite TV show, People Magazine, a certain band, Facebook, Pinterest, horoscope, crossword puzzles?

There are so many things people follow or pay attention to. It reveals what or who we are really into, what's important to us.

What do you suppose Jesus spends His time on, what does He pay attention to? It should be obvious from these seven letters in Revelation that Jesus pays attention to His Church, He keeps track of all that is going on in His Church. Jesus knows the intimate details of each local church. He knows what's going on spiritual, doctrinally, what they are teaching, what they believe, how they get along, what they do and don't do. He knows who's been bad or good.

He dictates a personal letter to seven different churches. And since He ever lives to make intercession for us before the Father, I am certain that He doesn't just write these letters, but He prays for these churches.

### **Philadelphia: The Missionary City of the Open Door.**

From Thyatira we traveled southeast 35 miles to Sardis. Now we continue southeast another 50 miles to Philadelphia.

Philadelphia overlooks the extensive and fertile plain of the Hermus river. It was on an important highway that connected Smyrna (Izmir) with the interior.

The city was named after two brothers who loved each other and cared for each other. Their love and loyalty won them the epithet “one who loves his brother.” Philadelphia means city of brotherly love.

Compared to the other cities this one was very recent. It was founded around 180BC to be a center for spreading the Greek culture, customs and language, so from the very beginning it had a missionary like purpose.

This whole region was also earthquake prone. The great earthquake of 17AD that destroyed Sardis also destroyed Philadelphia. Emperor Tiberius help fund the reconstruction and in his honor a temple was built for his worship and the worship of his son. For a while the city took a new name after their imperial god, and became Neocaesarea.

But Philadelphia was slow the recover and was more impoverished because of years of aftershocks that slowed rebuilding. As is often the case, after a severe earthquake there will follow many lessor aftershocks. But for Philadelphia the aftershocks continued as an everyday occurrence for two or three years.

Can you even imagine what that would do to your nerves? People lived in constant fear and were afraid to repair their homes. They had to constantly guard against falling walls. This drastically effected the psyche of the people who tended to stay out in the open country side. It created a desperate sense of insecurity and lack of stability. They lived in dread of impending disaster, “the day of trial.”

The church in Philadelphia thrived far longer than any of the others. When the rest of Turkey was succumbing to the growing invasion of the Muslim Turks, Philadelphia held up the banner of Christianity and continued to be loyal to Christ and to the truth, steadfast in their endurance.

By the 14<sup>th</sup> century Philadelphia stood alone as a free, self-governing Christian city against the entire Turkish army and government. It finally fell about 1390AD. They stayed faithful for over 1200 years. Even after they fell and were subjected to slavery they persevered in their faith and remained a real influence among their Muslim conquerors.

Today Turkey is one of the least Christian nations, maybe 4,000 evangelical Christians. Many of the old churches in Turkey have been converted into mosques.

### **Christ’s Character Identified with the Church.**

Christ identifies Himself as the holy and true One. This is really a daring claim. That He is holy means He is perfect, without sin, He is God. That He is true means He is trustworthy and reliable, He never lies but always speaks the truth. He can be followed and trusted to lead in the way of righteousness. This claim is meant to boost confidence for those who follow Him.

Jesus has the key of David, the sign and symbol of highest authority and power. He has the key to open and lock all doors. Jesus is unstoppable, He cannot fail. He is greater than every other power in the universe.

He is always the Lord of the universe, King of kings and the Lord of lord, He is the Lord of glory, the creator of all things, superior to all the angels, in whom all the fullness of God dwells.

Jesus is vastly bigger than any problem or issue you are dealing with or facing. The bigger Jesus is in our eyes the smaller our problems and concerns become. Whatever you have, whatever you trust, is nothing compared to Him.

### **Christ's Commendation.**

Once again, Jesus says, "I know you. I know your works."

After all the sad or bad news about other churches, it is refreshing to hear some good news about a church. The second and second to last letter contain only positive words from Jesus. Remember Smyrna was the other good letter.

Does this mean the church in Philadelphia was perfect, that they had no sins? No, there is no perfect church, no church without sin. Wherever two or three are gathered in Jesus name, Jesus is there and sin is there.

But they weren't covering up their sin and they weren't justifying their sin and they weren't encouraging others to sin. They were daily laying their sins on Jesus. They are repenting and striving to walk in the paths of righteousness, to walk by the Spirit according to the Word.

Jesus takes His keys and sets before them an open door for *three reasons*.

*First*, because they were small, weak and insignificant, because they had little power. Jesus delights to take the small, the weak, the foolish things of the world to shame the wise and strong.

*Second*, they kept Jesus' word. This opens the doors of service and opportunity and keeps it open. The Word of God is the means used by the Spirit to open doors.

This is the open door of evangelism and service to all of Asia Minor, the interior of Turkey. Philadelphia was a gateway city on a crossroads of trade and communication, like many cities in the central part of the US, Dallas, OKC, Kansas City, St. Louis, Chicago, Indianapolis. From here access was gained to the great central plateau on Asia.

This was a special gift and a sign of Christ's favor and privilege upon the city, a favor given to no other. Jesus is saying that they will always have a testimony, their lamp stand will not be removed. Though feeble they will be preserved.

Notice keeping the Word is the key to everything good that happens to them.

*Third*, they had not denied His name.

I picture this being a humble church, not big and flashy, not famous or popular, but Philadelphia has been faithful and loyal even in the face of strong opposition.

Remember the *synagogue of Satan*, the Jews who fanatically opposed Christianity in Smyrna.

Only in these two cities is this Jewish persecution mentioned against the Jewish Christians.

They actively opposed the church of Jesus Christ. They claim to be the true people of God but they lie by their actions.

To be a Christian means we are hated by Satan and his demons. To be a Christian means we have an enemy who hates what we believe and what we do. Satan hates everything Jesus loves and everything Jesus does. Satan would destroy it all completely right now if he could.

Satan is doing enough to harm every local church, let's make sure we aren't adding any fuel to that fire by our own critical spirits or our own negativity or criticism or complaints.

Christ says they will see the humiliation of their enemies. That was the ancient prophecy the Jews expected to be fulfilled for them, that they would see their enemies bow before their feet. Little did they understand that they had become the enemies of God's people.

*I have loved you.*

In the face of the fact that the church is hated, is another greater fact. The church is loved. The holy one, the true one, the keeper of the keys, the Lord of the universe says to a weak, humble church, I love you.

Remember the Jews prided themselves on being the chosen people, the people loved and favored by God. They looked forward to being the victors and masters of the nations when the Messiah came to establish His kingdom.

But Jesus reverses things and says it is the Jews who will bow to the church that is now loved by Jesus. They are the true Jews, the new Israel of God, beloved by God.

Do you love what Jesus loves, do you love His church, do you love this church? I love you, the elders love you. I think many if not most of us love this church. Are you encourage at all in knowing that Jesus loves you?

### **Christ's Challenge and Promises**

They may have been small but they were great in God's eyes. To them who have little strength and perhaps feel humble, insecure, vulnerable, Jesus promises *three great things*.

*First*, He promises to keep them from the hour of trial or testing that is to come.

What a word of encouragement to a people who lived in dread of the final hour, that they would be kept from it. This doesn't mean they are immune from trouble or even persecution, but they will be protected.

They will be preserved through tribulation rather than be raptured from tribulation. By keeping the Word they will be able to endure.

**Romans 8:35** Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword?

The promise of victory is meant to encourage them to endeavor to persevere. May we be able to say with Paul:

**II Timothy 4:7-8** I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that Day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing.

*Second*, Jesus promises to make all the saints in Philadelphia pillars in the temple. A pillar represents something permanent. One of the things you notice when you walk among the ruins of these ancient cities is how many pillars are still standing.

This is an incredible security in the insecure location of Philadelphia. This is a spiritual promise they would never have to go out of it again. Never would they have to run into the open countryside in fear that it might fall on them.

*Third*, Jesus promises to write the name of God on the faithful, a sign of belonging, a sign of ownership and protection.

Remember Philadelphia is the only church of the seven to have changed its name for a while, the only city to abandon its old name in favor of a new imperial name. They became Neocaesarea. But they couldn't just rename themselves without the Emperors approval, which in his kindness he consented to grant.

So what news this must have been to hear that God was bestowing on them His own name and the name of the city of God. They will have all the blessings and privileges of those who belong to God, they will have the birthright.

Because they have stood fast for Christ and have acknowledged Him, He will stand fast for them and acknowledge them with His love, loyalty, favor and approval.

They are the pillar in God's temple, they have the name of God written on them, they are the new Jerusalem.

## **Application and conclusion.**

Lynden shares some similarities. It stands out as an oasis of faithfulness in a very liberal state and culture. It has been persecuted by those who claim to be enlightened and tolerant, but don't like what Lynden stands for.

God's word is preached and honored, ancient truths and values are still upheld. There is a steadfastness in the face of ridicule and opposition and in the face of temptation to be more progressive or politically correct.

May God make us always faithful to His word and never ashamed of the Gospel. Do you love the Word? Do you keep it? If you do you will have power and authority.

To be a humble follower of Jesus Christ means we must be a keeper of His Word, all His Word, the whole truth and nothing but the truth.

If we ever exchange our wholehearted commitment to the authority of the Word of God for acceptance in the world we will lose our place as an upholder of the pillar and foundation of the truth.

Jesus knows your works, your service, your volunteering, your giving, your words of encouragement, your acts of kindness, your prayers for your church, your heart and attitude for your church, your faithfulness, your loyalty. He knows what you are paying attention to and what you care about.

May Jesus see our works and that we love Him, even when we are poor and weak and seem to do so little. May He loves us, and preserve and protect us to the end.

May God make us to be oaks of righteousness, that stand in the winds and storms as a faithful witness to our holy and true God who has written His name on us and who loves us with a great love.

May God make us an immovable pillar in the temple of the new heavenly Jerusalem.

**Psalm 27:4** One thing have I asked of the Lord, that will I seek after:  
that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life,  
to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord and to inquire in his temple.

**Revelation 3:13** He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.