

Revelation 1.8
Revelation 3:7-13
Philadelphia: The Church in Revival

Introduction **Commission**

The city of brotherly love; This church had a vision to reach a lost world, and God set before them--an open door.

Philadelphia was an outpost city. It was on the very border of Greek culture and influence. The city itself was a Greek "missionary" city built to expand Greek language and culture. To the Greeks and Romans anyone who did not share their language and culture was uncivilized (kind of like American culture). Philadelphia was a city that Caesar had given an open door for the spread of Greek ideas to the ends of the world. The city was called the gateway to the east. It was also called little Athens because of the amount of temples. The major problem was it was located on a massive geologic fault line. The city was destroyed in 17BC along with Sardis when an earthquake hit. After the earthquake some of the citizens refused to move back into the city.

Philadelphia was a church where Jesus has nothing but good news! Most of the churches had any number of problems, but Jesus has no criticism for this church. Ephesus had left her first love, Pergamum was a church that had compromised, Thyatira had tolerated apostasy; Sardis was spiritually dead. Ephesus and Smyrna have been just about the only bright spots, Smyrna was in the midst of intense persecution and abject poverty. Philadelphia was being faithful and obedient.

Character (v.7)

1. Jesus reveals himself as the one who is "Holy" and "True". Throughout the OT God is revealed as Holy. He is perfect in holiness. Holy means separate or distinct. God is holy in the sense that He is perfect and character and utterly removed from sin. But it means more. God is holy in that he is utterly distinct from his creation. Isaiah the prophet often refers to God as the "Holy One". Isaiah 40:25; "To whom will you compare me, or who is my equal? says the Holy One." Isaiah 43:15 "I am the Lord, your Holy One, Israel's Creator, your King." Holy One is both a title of character and deity. Here Jesus reveals that he is "The Holy One". This is blatant declaration that he is God.

2. Jesus is also "true". There are two Greek words for "true". One word *alethes* means true as opposed to false. The other word *alethinos* means true in the sense of real, versus unreal. Here Jesus declares that He is reality. When Jesus says that he is "real" it means that he is the source of reality. I believe Jesus reveals himself this way because the church in Philadelphia are rooted and grounded in the truth that Jesus is reality.

Jesus is real, authentic, not a copy or a fake. There were hundreds of gods and goddesses, fake, mythological. Only Jesus has the claim to be the true God. It is also worth noting that the martyrs in heaven address Jesus as "holy and true" (Rev.6:10). "Their argument was that, because he was holy, he had to judge sin, and because he was true, he had to vindicate his people who had been wickedly slain" (Warren Wiersbe p. 578).

3. "I am the one who holds the key of David". This is taken from Isa 22:22-23 "The key of the house of David I will lay on his shoulder; so he shall open, and no one shall shut; and he shall shut, and no one shall open. I will fasten him as a peg in a secure place, and he will become a glorious throne to his father's house".

A key in scripture is the symbol of authority. A key allows entrance or blocks entrance. Locks keep people in or out. When this prophecy in Isaiah was written, Shebna was the palace administrator in the royal house of Hezekiah. Assyria had invaded Judah (as Isaiah had warned), but the Jewish leaders were trusting Egypt not God, to deliver the nation.

The prophecy revealed that God was going to remove Shebna and replace him with Eliakim. The palace steward, the position that Eliakim was to assume, granted royal audience to the king's throne room. He had the authority to allow people in, or keep people out. No one entered the presence of the king without his screening. He was also the one who kept the key to the King's treasury.

In 2 Samuel a prophecy is given to David that an everlasting kingdom was to be given to his descendants. There is a multiple fulfillment; Solomon became ruler, yet in the future the Son of David, King Jesus would establish an everlasting kingdom. That is why the genealogies had to be traced to David. Jesus is the only candidate who fulfills the promise. Jesus is the messianic king who will reign forever. The key to the house of David represents the absolute authority over the age to come which belongs to Jesus Christ. Jesus opens the door to the kingdom; he is also the one who shuts the door. What the Lord opens, no one can shut, and what he closes, no one can open. The Lord Jesus Christ has absolute authority in the coming kingdom.

Jesus is telling the men and women of Philadelphia that he is using his Key of David--to place before them an open door that no man can shut; that is a guaranteed entry into His messianic kingdom. **This means an unprecedented opportunity to minister.**

Philadelphia may have faced what seems like to great obstacles; they were small in numbers and limited in resources. Would they allow their limitations to hinder the ministry opportunity that God had given them? No--they were true to God and to his word, they were not large or strong but they were faithful and obedient. It is not the size or the strength of a church--but faith in the call and command of God. "God's commands are his enablements." IF Jesus Christ gave them an open door, then they would walk through it. Martin Luther put it this way in his well known hymn:

Did we in our own strength confide,
Our striving would be losing.
Were not the right man on our side,
The man of God's own choosing.

They faced opposition from the Jews in the city (v.9). But it was really the opposition of Satan (we battle not against flesh and blood Eph. 6:12). How were the Jews opposing the church at Philadelphia? I believe they were excluding Messianic believers from the Synagogue. Also they were fond of falsely accusing the brethren, which was the way that unbelieving Jews often accused Paul.

It is very difficult to share Christ in a community where someone is spreading lies about you. Cor 16:9 For a great and effective door has opened to me, and there are many adversaries. With opportunity often comes opposition. Someone has said unbelief sees obstacles, but faith sees opportunities.

One practical thing this means is that God will take care of our enemies. If we take care of God's work, he will take care of our battles.

Commendation (v.8)

There are four things, four character issues that Jesus finds in the church at Philadelphia that delights the Lord. These are four things that we must cultivate as individuals and as a church.

- 1. "For you have a little strength" (power) *dunamis*.** Philadelphia was not large in numbers or in wealth.
- 2. "have kept my word" (*tereo*).** The word kept means "to guard or protect". The church at Philadelphia was obeying God's word. In John's writing consistent obedience to Jesus means keeping his commandments. This is in stark contrast to Sardis which was dead because of their lack of obedience. Philadelphia had spiritual power and obedience to God's Word.
- 3. "and have not denied my name" (faithfulness).** The word "deny" can mean several things. It can mean to disown, to renounce or repudiate."
- 4. (v.10) "You have kept my command to persevere".** That means to have patient endurance. It means to bear with courage--when you suffer, when you are afflicted, when you experience persecution. When things get bad--they got better.

There wasn't much money in 1932, so it was no time to buy a drugstore. Then

grasshoppers ate all the crops in the region. This, in turn was followed by a dust bowl, a long drought, temperatures for ten days straight of over 100 degrees. So the drugstore seemed about to fold. Nevertheless, Ted and Dorothy Husted were believers in God. They asked themselves: "How can we get these people into the drugstore?" They said, "We'll put up some signs." So, they went 25 miles in each direction and put up signs that read, "Free Ice Water at the Wall Drugstore, Wall, S.D." They put up signs at 10 miles; and at 5 miles the sign read: "Hold on! It's Only 5 Miles to the Wall Drugstore and Free Ice Water." They got so enthusiastic that they even put up a sign at Albany, New York: "1725 Miles to the Wall Drugstore". Now druggists had been handing out free ice water for generations. But Ted & Dorothy were the first people who ever thought of advertising it. Today more than 15,000 people crowd the drugstore on a busy day in a town of 800 people. It remains the most spectacularly, successful drugstore in the entire industry.

What standards do you use to evaluate your church? What are you looking for in a church? Most people look at the teaching/preaching; does it have a great worship leader, what about the children's ministry and activities for youth? Do you look at location, comfort, and are the people nice?

But what does Jesus look for in the church? He likes at least four things! He likes to see some power--I think that means the reality of the Holy Spirit, working in people. The Holy Spirit at work in a group of people who love Jesus. I believe the Lord likes obedience to His Word. This is why Bible teaching is so important, and Bible reading. So you will know and obey His word! Are the people living by the principles of the Word of God? He likes faithfulness---people who do not deny Him--either with words or with actions, either by what they say or by what they do. AND Jesus likes people who endure--people who hang in there through good times and bad times, the church at Philadelphia had those characteristics.

Condemnation

1. This church (along with Smyrna) Jesus has no word of rebuke or correction or condemnation. They remained faithful and Jesus commends them.

2. The church at Philadelphia had discovered the secret to survival in the world; the strategies for surviving to the end of the world.

Counsel

1. Since there is no condemnation, there also is not counsel or rebuke. But he does have some words of encouragement for those who are in the church.

2. (v.11) Jesus says he is coming quickly! The word quickly means "soon". His timing is perfect. The word "hold fast" means "hold on!" It means to grasp firmly so that it

doesn't slip away. The verb tense in the Greek language implies and constant and continual action. Bob Beltz; "Firmly and tenaciously grasp on to the power you have; firmly and tenaciously continue to be an obedient church; firmly and tenaciously be faithful; firmly and tenaciously persevere." Why? So that no one would take their crown.

The Bible teaches that God rewards, or withholds rewards for the believer on the basis of this life. This should "blow your mind", our eternal destiny is contingent on our faithfulness in this life. The choices and opportunities we have today will result in reward or the lack of reward. Life now is kind of like boot camp, or the police academy. We receive training, and testing, we are evaluated on the basis of faithfulness and obedience. We can make decisions that oppose God's plans and purposes for our life.

God has given us the freedom to live our lives the way we choose. But we can only live this life once. Paul wrote, "Everyone that runs the race does not receive the prize, so run the race in such a way that you win the crown" (I Cor. 9:24). Jesus continues to challenge the churches, and therefore us--we are to hold on to the reality of the Spirit, live in obedience to His word, remain faithful to his name, and endure the hard times.

Challenge (v.9)

There is a series of challenges to the overcomers in Philadelphia:

1. Messianic World Dominion: Jews were interested in the Gentile nations falling at the feet of messiah and acknowledging their God is God and that God loves Israel. Jesus turns this around and makes it a promise to the church.

2. (v.10) Second Promise: Escape From the Wrath To Come: "The hour of trial" What is that? "The hour of trial" is chapters 6-19. It is called the time of Jacob's sorrow, the great tribulation. This seven year period will end with the return of Jesus Christ. The promise to this church is that Christ will keep them from the hour of trial. What does that mean? Does it mean that Christ will take them out of the world so that they will not go through the tribulation, or does it mean he will protect them in the midst of the tribulation? That question will be examined at length in chapter 12. But here is some food for thought. I believe there was a local trial, that Philadelphia experienced and overcame. Perhaps there was some local persecution that they did not experience. But in the global sense, the church history sense, if this is the church at the end of the age (and I believe it is;) note: The trial involves them that dwell on the earth Rev. 6:10; 8:13; 11:10; 12:12; 13:8; 12.14; 14:6; 17:2, 8)

3. (v.12) Third Promise: "Him who overcomes I will make a pillar in the temple of my God." In a city plagued with earthquake problems, this was good news! The pillar was the point of stability, there is no need to flee or danger of destruction. Ancient cities often honored their noble citizens by erecting a pillar with their

names inscribed on them. There is no temple in heaven so his pillars are faithful people, who bear his name for glory.

What is the temple of God? Acts 7:48 and 17:24 say that God does not dwell in a temple, or at least not anything made with human hands. The entire universe is his temple. Rev. 21:22 says that in the New Jerusalem there is no temple because God himself is the temple. To be a pillar was symbolic of importance, authority. The faithful believer holds such a position in the kingdom to come. The believer will experience the conscious presence of God.

4. The fourth promise: Ownership--(v.12) God writes his name on the things he owns--not because his stuff gets confused with other people's stuff. Writing the name occurs 27 times in the book of revelation. It is used both in writing God's name and the name or the mark of the beast. There are at least five dimensions to this concept. (1) identification: those who receive a certain name are identified according to that name. Those who belong to the Beast have the mark of the beast. (2) ownership; again you are owned by whoever has their name on you; (3) citizenship "The New Jerusalem" is your new home and country-- your new address in eternity. Maybe their like tags in case you get lost a kind of eternal medical alert bracelet. (4) Authority; We carry the authority of the one who's name we have been marked with. (5) blessing; Numbers 6, God says "I will place my name on the Israelites and I will bless them"

THE name of God is the mark of the survivor. Do you want to know how to survive until the end of the world? Jesus' message is keep my Word.

CONCLUSION

The battle of Britain was at its height. Night and day the enemy bombers flew in across the English channel to unload their cargoes of death and destruction on the cities and the villages below. The Royal Air Force had put up a magnificent fight. Sir Winston Churchill, in recounting later what the world owed to that valiant group of men who flew their battered Hurricanes and Spitfires against incalculable odds, declared, "Never before in the field of human conflict have so many owed so much to so few." In one lonely RAF outpost, a group of fighter pilots were gathered in the mess hall. It was a scene often repeated in those days. The men were worn out with fatigue, they were dirty and disheveled, their eyes were bleary, and beards sprouted on their chins. They were searching for a moments relaxation before climbing the skies again to fight off more NAZI airwolves. Suddenly a buzzer sounded, and a voice came over the intercom from the operations room. "Bandits at 15,000 ft over P25. Over! At once the pilots were on their feet and racing for the runways. Pausing on his way, the squadron leader barked back into the intercom one short reply; "Message received and understood". "He that hath an ear, let him

hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches".

I would very much like our church to be like Philadelphia. God has given us opportunities to reach out to the world. If He opens the door we should work, if he shuts the door, we should wait. We should remain faithful and above all see opportunities instead of obstacles. If we miss our opportunities we lose our rewards (crowns) and this means being ashamed before him when he comes.