

Philadelphia: Enduring Faithfulness

Revelation 3:7-13

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Well, we're considering the letters to the seven churches in the Book of Revelation. So far, as we've made our way through these seven churches, we've looked at five of them. Let me just remind you that these were real small churches that the Apostle Paul had planted. And then, after Paul's death, John the Apostle moved from Jerusalem to Asia Minor to modern Turkey, where these churches were located, are located, and there he served these churches. And when he was exiled on the isle of Patmos under the persecution under Domitian, he there received this revelation from Jesus Christ. And it begins with these letters to these seven real churches.

But as I mentioned to you, not only are they seven real churches, but they are representative of the different kinds of churches that exist in every place and in every time. Every church in our area can sort of find its counterpart, every true church, can find its counterpart in these seven churches or some blending of them.

So let me just remind you of what we've learned so far. The church in Ephesus was a church characterized by loveless fidelity, in Smyrna, faithful suffering, in Pergamum, undiscerning tolerance, in Thyatira, extra-biblical authority, in Sardis, last time, we saw dead Christianity, where most of the people in the church lacked spiritual life, only a few truly knew the Lord.

Tonight we come to Revelation 3:7-13. Let's read it together, the message to the church in Philadelphia.

“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:

‘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 kept My word, and have not denied My name. 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. 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. 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. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”

The focus of this letter is that Christ praises His church for its enduring faithfulness to Him and to His word. We could call the church in Philadelphia that, it's a church that's characterized by enduring faithfulness.

Now with each of the seven letters, we are following the outline that Christ Himself does and so we will do so again tonight. So let's begin then, as we consider this church, by looking at the introduction to the letter, the command to write that occurs in verse 7. Look again at verse 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.” Now, as we look at this introduction, as we have each time, let's begin by considering the character of this city. He says, “to the angel of the church in Philadelphia.” You remember that the Apostle John gave this letter, a kind of circular letter but one that was addressed, had portions of it here addressed to each of the churches, to his messenger from the isle of Patmos and this messenger came to Asia Minor.

And you remember that there on the coast, you can see it about halfway down on the left side of this slide, is the city of Ephesus, that's where he started, the messenger started, and then he would have moved up the coast to Smyrna, to Pergamum, then to Thyatira, down to Sardis, you can see now we're going south again, and then to Philadelphia. The city of Philadelphia was about 30 miles southeast of Sardis. It was on a main trade route from Smyrna on the coast toward the eastern regions of Mysia Lydia and Phrygia or Phrygia. It was also on a major

Roman postal road that headed east. Because of the city's strategic placement it was known for its commerce. It was even called the gateway to the east.

The city itself was located at the eastern end of a valley alongside a tributary of the Hermes River. There's a picture of that, you can see the valley in the distance there, and here is a better view. The city was built on the acropolis, and it wasn't a large acropolis like some of the cities we've looked at, but it was on a rise and had a view of the valley. It was well situated, both commercially and militarily, and it was in a region that was marked by volcanoes and its volcanic soil was extremely fertile. In fact, it was an area that was perfect for growing grapes, produce for which the city was famous and which really was an addition to their prosperity. So, this is what the city was known for.

Unfortunately, those volcanoes that made this such a fertile area and so appropriate for growing grapes, was also vulnerable to earthquakes because of that. So you had that combination. Here you see some of the grapevines even today and you can see the kind of area that Philadelphia occupied in the ancient world. But again, very fertile, prone, vulnerable to earthquakes. Because of its location, again, the city was expected to try to expand the Greek influence toward the east and they were able to carry that out successfully, the Asian areas just to their east came under the influence of Greek culture and eventually that area spoke only Greek.

As far as its history, this was the most recently founded of the seven cities, sometime after 189 B.C. It was founded by either Eumenes the second of Pergamum or his younger brother, Attalus Philadelphus, and he was called that because of his love and loyalty for his brother. On several occasions the younger brother gave up the throne to his older brother, and so he came to be known as Philadelphus and the city was named after him and became the city of brotherly love. Unlike its modern counterpart, the city of brotherly shove. No, I'm sorry, for those of you from Philadelphia.

The earthquake that I mentioned last week that destroyed Sardis in 17 A.D. also destroyed the city of Philadelphia. In fact, Philadelphia was actually closer to the epicenter and aftershocks continued there for a considerable period of time. The Greek writer Strabo says that the walls of the city were constantly cracked. Both because of the original major quake and the continuing pattern of aftershocks that continued in the many years after that. Many of the people of

Philadelphia were so concerned about the collapse of the major structures in cities that they actually left the city and built lean to's outside the city in which to live and they took up, even those who hadn't previously had this practice, took up farming because they were so concerned about living within the context of the city. Keep that in mind. That will factor back in in Christ's later comments.

As far as its politics, after that great earthquake in 17 A.D., the Roman emperor removed the requirement for the city to pay tribute for a period of five years so that it could recover and rebuild. And so out of gratitude for that the city fathers renamed, for a time, they renamed Philadelphia, Neocaesarea. In the 80's A.D. the city also added a new name to Philadelphia and that was Flavia, the name of the imperial dynasty. So the city was clearly closely aligned to Rome, but it sort of had several different name changes. That too, will come back to factor in later.

But in 92 A.D. the city's relationship with Rome soured. Rome was in the middle of a famine and needed grain to feed their armies. So the Emperor Domitian issued an imperial edict demanding that half of the grapevines in Philadelphia be destroyed and that no new ones were to be planted. Why did he do this? Well, ostensibly it was to encourage the farmers to grow grain on those now empty fields, but of course grain was a much cheaper crop and would never produce the same revenue as the grapes. Others conjecture the Emperor had a far more sinister motive and that was to protect the vineyards in Italy from the excellent grapes that were grown in the city of Philadelphia. Regardless, this decision was disastrous for Philadelphia because it would take years for those grapevines to grow back. So, its relationship with Rome soured significantly just before this letter was written.

As far as its religion, this city was characterized by a blend of Anatolian and Greek gods and goddesses. As you might guess, for a city with this history, the patron deity of the city of Philadelphia was Dionysus, the god of wine. From this letter, we also know that there was a powerful Jewish community in this city as well. In fact, later in 110 A.D. Ignatius went and visited the city and then he wrote a letter back to the city in which he discussed the problems the church was facing from that very powerful, influential Jewish community that was antagonistic toward the church there.

So that's the city, let's consider, secondly, the history of the church. Again, He says in verse 7, "And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia." The New Testament says nothing about the founding of this church, but undoubtedly, like the other six churches, it was founded by Paul during his stay in Ephesus in the early 50s A.D. when we read in Acts 19:10 that the word of the Lord went out from Ephesus to all of the surrounding cities and villages. So undoubtedly this church had been around for more than 40 years by the time this letter was written.

Now in the introduction, in addition to the city and the church, Christ begins with a description of Himself. Notice what He says, verse 7, He introduces Himself to this church with three descriptions. First of all, He says that He is set apart and worthy of worship. Notice verse 7, "He who is holy." He is describing Himself here. Of course, in the Old Testament God is often referred to as the Holy One, again and again. In Revelation 6:10 this expression is used of the Father. So here it's used of Christ and it simply means that Christ is set apart. He is unique. There is no one like Him. Christ is in a category all of His own.

You know, when we think about things, we think in categories, you think of your pet and you think dog or cat. There's a category in which that animal fits. Even with people we do that, right? There are categories in which people fit. There's no category for God. There's only one person in God's category. He is holy. He is unique. He's set apart. And therefore, He is worthy and He alone is worthy of worship. That's what Christ is saying. "He who is holy."

Secondly, Christ describes Himself in this way, He is the genuine Messiah, the real Messiah, who is faithful to His people. Notice that expression in verse 7, "who is true." Again, in chapter 6 verse 10 this is used of God. And this word true is a different form of a familiar word, but it can mean one of two things. It can mean either genuine, that is real, or it can mean faithful. It's used both of those ways in other places in Revelation. And so, many of the commentators suggest, and I think they're absolutely right, that Jesus intends both of them here. He intends to say to this church, listen, I am the genuine Messiah; even if the Jews in your community deny Me, know that I am the true one, and that I am faithful to all who follow Me, I will vindicate My own, as will become very clear in the rest of this letter.

Thirdly, Jesus describes Himself in this way, He alone controls access to His kingdom. Notice verse 7 goes on to say, "He who has the key of David." This is an allusion to Isaiah 22,

where God demands that Eliakim replace Shebna as the chief steward in Hezekiah's house. Listen to Isaiah 22:22, "Then I will set the key of the House of David on his shoulder, when he opens no one will shut, when he shuts, no one will open." That's Isaiah 22:22. Now in Isaiah, in context there, "the key of the house of David" referred to access to the king and to his palace. And this man who was going to be appointed had power to open and shut, and that stressed his authority, his absolute authority over who came and who went.

In Revelation 3 the same idea is present. The key here is a metaphor for Jesus' control. As the Messiah who is from David, He has the key, the key to what? The key to His kingdom, the key which gives access to His kingdom. So He goes on to say in verse 7, "I am the one who opens and no one will shut, and who shuts and no one opens." Now here the concept of open and shut had special meaning to the believers in Philadelphia. I mean think about it, they had been shut out. They had been shut out of the Jewish synagogue, those who were Jewish or who were proselytized to Judaism before their conversion. They had been shut out of the pagan temples because they were considered to be atheists because they didn't embrace the gods of Rome and Greece. But Christ reminds these poor believers that He and He alone has the authority to open and shut the entrance to heaven. His decision will be final and unchangeable. So that's how He begins to introduce Himself in this letter to the church in Philadelphia.

Now that brings us then to the body of the letter in which we learn the state of the church, and that should say verses 8 through 11. The body of each letter begins with the same words. In every one of the seven letters, seven times Jesus says, "I know," "I know," "I know." And here He says it again in verse 8, "I know your deeds." Now what's remarkable about this church is that only this church and the church in Smyrna, those are the only two churches that receive no correction from Christ, only commendation; that's all this church receives. Wouldn't we love to be a church like that, where Christ has only good things to say. So let's consider what His commendation is of this church.

Christ's commendation of the church, verse 8, "I know your deeds. Behold, I have put before you an open door which no one can shut." Now that expression in the middle there, "Behold, I have put before you an open door which no one can shut," is parenthetical, so we're going to skip to "I know your deeds," because the way the Greek reads in all of the

letters is, ““I know your deeds,”” is introduced by this clause that follows, ““because you have a little power, and have kept My word, and not denied My name.”” So here are their deeds, here’s His commendation. Christ singles out three commendable, praiseworthy traits of this church, traits that are always commendable in a church.

First of all, He says, ““you have a little power.”” Now occasionally this line is interpreted as a kind of rebuke, but that’s not the way to read this. These are commendations by Christ. No reputable commentators interpret it that way. So what is He saying? What it means is this, He’s saying, listen, I’m going to commend you for a couple of things, but I want to acknowledge at the outset that you are not a large powerful influential church. That’s what He’s saying. You are a small church with very little power, very little influence in your community. The truth is, as we’ll see, these people were looked down on, they were persecuted, they were ostracized, they were ridiculed. But in spite of all of that, they remain faithful. Notice, He goes on to say, ““you have kept My word.”” Likely, kept here doesn’t mean guard, which it can mean, but it means obeyed, ““you have obeyed My word.”” This small insignificant church had faithfully endeavored to obey Christ’s word, the truth revealed in Scripture. And then He says, ““you have not denied My name.”” They had remained loyal to Christ. You remember, Luke 12:8-9, He said,

“I say to you, everyone who confesses Me before men, the Son of Man will confess him also before the angels of God; but he who denies Me before men will be denied before the angels of God.”

That is, before God Himself. This little body of believers, a small little church, not powerful, not influential, but they had remained faithful to Christ’s word. They had kept it, they had obeyed it, and they had remained loyal to Him, they hadn’t denied His name. Because of their faithfulness, Christ made them several promises.

Before we move to the promises though, I just want you to think about what we just saw. Understand this, Christ sees every church that belongs to Him. He sees them and He knows, He knows the large, the powerful, the influential and He knows the very small, insignificant, out of the way, nobody knows about them churches. Do you realize most of the churches in America are like that? The median church size in America on a Sunday morning, median, meaning 50

percent on a Sunday morning are smaller and 50 percent are larger, the median church size in America is 75 people. Fifty percent of the churches in America are small, little, insignificant churches and Christ knows every one of them. And He has just as clear a vision of what's happening there as He does the church in Philadelphia. And as He does the large influential churches like Ephesus.

So let's move on to Christ's promises to the church because of their faithfulness. First of all, He promises them admission into His kingdom. Look at verse 8., ""Behold, I have put before you an open door which no one can shut."" Now historically there have been two primary interpretations of that expression. Perhaps you've heard the first, the first one is this, that this is an open door to missionary opportunity, that that's what this is describing. Because that's how this same expression is used, not in the Apostle John's writings, but in the Apostle Paul's writing, and in the Book of Acts. For example, 1 Corinthians 16:9 says this, "a wide door for effective service has opened to me, but there are many adversaries." Second Corinthians 2:12, "Now when I came to Troas for the gospel of Christ and when a door was opened for me in the Lord." In Acts 14:27, "When they had arrived and gathered the church together, they began to report all the things that God had done with them and how He had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles."

Now, those who hold this view call this the missionary church, that God opened the doors for evangelism and for missionary outreach. And they point to the fact, you remember I told you that this city was strategically located and had been assigned, essentially, the missionary responsibility as a city to spread the Greek culture east? They said, see that's the same thing that Christ was assigning this church spiritually and that was to give them this missionary assignment with the gospel. And that's possible. But I think the second primary interpretation of this is more likely in context. It's certainly the most common view today and it's the one that makes the most sense, and I'll show you why in a moment, and that is, it's an open door to the kingdom. Because it fits better, this idea fits better with verse 7 and the key of David and the opening and shutting that's referenced there in its context. So what is Jesus saying to this church? He's saying: Listen, you've been shut out of everything. You've been shut out of the synagogue. You've been shut out of the pagan temples. You've been shut out of the lives of the people around you. But I'm going to put an open door. I have the keys into My kingdom

and I'm going to open the door for you. You are coming in and no one can shut that door and refuse you admission. So, He promises this church and the true believers there admission into His kingdom.

Secondly, He promises vindication before their enemies, verse 9, ““Behold, I will cause those of the synagogue of Satan.”” Stop there for a moment. You remember, that's very similar to something that's already been said. Go back to chapter 2 verse 9, the church in Smyrna, interesting, it's the only other church that received no correction but only praise, and they too were facing the same sort of problems. Chapter 2 verse 9, ““I know your tribulation, your poverty (but you are rich), and the blasphemy by those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan.”” Now go back to the church in Philadelphia.

First of all, let me just say what I said then, this is not encouraging anti-Semitism. Remember, Jesus was Jewish, John the Apostle was Jewish. So this isn't about being hateful toward Jewish people. Instead, our Lord is simply making this important point, that all unbelievers, including the religious, even those who claim to worship the God of the Bible, if they are not true believers, they are not worshiping God, but they are worshiping Satan. They are, in the words of John 8:44, ““of their father the devil,”” Jesus says here, and this is Jesus, a Jewish man and obviously our Lord, and He says the Jews who attacked the believers in this church were part of the ““synagogue of Satan,”” it wasn't a gathering of God's people, but Satan's.

He goes on to say in verse 9, ““who say they are Jews but are not, but lie.”” You see, being a physical descendant of Abraham doesn't make you a true Jew spiritually. Romans 2:28-29 talk about that. The Jews in Philadelphia who persecuted the Christians in the church, they said they were Jews, and they were physically. But Jesus says, they're not Jewish spiritually, they're instead the children of Satan, not the true children of Abraham, as Jesus Himself talked about during His ministry. He goes on in verse 9, ““I will make them come and bow down at your feet.”” Now notice, this is interesting, Christ doesn't say they will come bow down at My feet, but your feet. This isn't worship, this is submission and recognition that they're in the right.

This is an allusion actually to Isaiah 60:14, where it says, ““The sons of those who afflicted you will come bowing to you, and all those who despised you will bow themselves at the soles of your feet; and they will call you the city of the LORD, the Zion of the Holy One of Israel.”” In

that text in Isaiah 60, God promised the Jewish people that in the last day the Gentiles would have to acknowledge the relationship that the Jews have with God. Jesus here says the same thing is true for Jewish unbelievers, they will be forced to acknowledge the relationship that Gentile believers have with God.

Christ was promising those in the church who suffer persecution and ridicule in this life, don't miss this, because our brothers and sisters around the world are facing that tonight. Some of you face that in your jobs and your schools and in your other, in your families and other places. Christ was promising those in His church who suffered persecution and ridicule in this life, that He will one day completely vindicate them. Either at the judgment or it's possible, the implication is here, even the salvation of some of their Jewish enemies and adversaries. Verse 9 goes on to say, Christ says, ""I will make them know,"" I love this, ""I will make them know that I loved you."" Christ has always loved His church and someday He will make even our enemies know that He has an abiding love for us who have believed in Him.

Thirdly, He promises protection from God's wrath in verse 10. Now notice, Christ begins verse 10 with the reason He makes the promise that follows to the church. So let's start with the reason, verse 10, ""Because you have kept the word of My perseverance."" Believers in Philadelphia were characterized, as we've noted, by enduring faithfulness. But notice, He specifically says, ""you have kept,"" or you have followed, ""the message you heard about My perseverance."" We read it this morning, didn't we? On the slide from Hebrews 12, Jesus' endurance, "He endured such hostility by sinners against Himself," but He kept His eyes on the prize. He says, you you've heard about My endurance. You've heard how I kept My face set towards the cross, how I kept My face set there, "for the joy that was set before Me."

You understand that and you have kept that same message. Jesus' own endurance in trials provided a pattern for the endurance of the believers in Philadelphia. And because of their enduring faithfulness following the pattern of Christ Himself, He makes them this amazing promise. Look at verse 10, ""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.""

Now, that is an amazing promise, but what exactly is the promise? Well, to determine what Christ meant we have to ask and answer two questions. First of all, what is the ""hour of

testing””? Well, there are two possibilities. One is, He’s talking about a brief, localized trial, like the one in Smyrna, you remember, in chapter 2 verse 10, ““the devil is about to cast some of you into prison, so that you’ll be tested, and you’ll have tribulation for ten days.”” That’s one possibility. The other possibility is that Jesus is talking about the great tribulation, that seven year period when God pours out His wrath on this world and takes back this world for His Son.

It has to be this second option, for several reasons. First of all, what Christ was describing, notice, ““would come upon the whole world.”” Now, ““the whole world,”” that expression occurs two other times in Revelation, 12:9 and 16:14. In both cases, it’s the entire world of unbelievers. Also, what Christ was describing here in this verse was intended, notice, ““to test those who dwell on the earth.”” That expression, ““those who dwell on the earth,”” or we could say, earth dwellers. That expression occurs many times in Revelation and it always refers to the entire world of unbelievers.

So both expressions here then point to a worldwide time of wrath that God will bring upon the entire world of unbelievers, in context, in Revelation, this has to be referring to the judgments that are called the judgments of the seals, the trumpets, and the bowls, that Christ Himself will unleash on the whole world during the future seven year period called the tribulation. It’s described, as we’ll see, from chapter 6 all the way through chapter 19. This period is the same as Daniel’s 70th week. You can check that out. We studied through Daniel, you can go back and listen to that. It’s also called the time of Jacob’s trouble in Jeremiah 30.

So, what Jesus is talking about here is not some localized trial for the church in Philadelphia. He’s talking about the great tribulation. And by the way, that’s what most agree that Jesus is referring to. So that brings us to our second question, and this is the one where there’s a little more debate. What does ““keep from”” mean? Well, there are two possibilities again. First of all, it could mean that Christ will protect His people by preserving them through the tribulation and preserving them from God’s wrath as they live through it. Those who take this view support this view by citing John 17:15 where this same proposition is used and it says, ““I do not ask You to take them out of,” *ek* is the preposition, ““I don’t ask you to take them out of the world, but to keep them from the evil one.”” They say listen, there’s Jesus saying, I’m not

saying pull them out of the world, just preserve them through it, so that must be what that means here. Well, that's a little quick because John 17:15 has an entirely different context. It describes the present battle with evil, not God's future wrath.

A second option is that it means Christ will protect His people by removing them from the tribulation. They will not be in it. That is, those who have come to Christ before it begins. This preposition that's translated here "from" can also mean to preserve by removing. In fact, I think the expression Christ uses here, "to keep from an hour of testing," strongly argues for this interpretation. Think about it, why would you say, I'm going to preserve them through an hour. The implication of even this short timeframe references the idea of protection from. Christ promised to keep this church and all faithful believers from the coming tribulation.

Now, let me just say, this verse doesn't prove a pre-tribulation rapture, that Christ is coming before the tribulation begins. There are other passages where it's taught more explicitly, John 14:1 to 3, 1 Corinthians 15:51 and 52, 1 Thessalonians 4. You can, if you're curious about the rapture, I did a couple of messages on it in our systematic theology series, you can go back and listen. My only point here is to say that this verse compliments and certainly supports the idea that Christ will come for His church and remove them from the earth before the tribulation begins. He is promising that He will keep His church and all faithful believers from the coming tribulation.

That brings us back to our text. We've seen Christ's commendation, His promises to the church. In verse 11 we see Christ's call for perseverance. Verse 11, He says, "I am coming quickly." Now, this isn't like the previous references in the letters to the churches about the coming of Christ. Before this the references to His coming have been in judgment on individual churches. You remember, He said to Ephesus, "I'm going to come to you and I'm going to remove your lampstand." To Pergamum, to Sardis, He said, "I'm going to come quickly and you're not going to know when I come." And the implication is He's coming to judge, to punish because of their sin.

But here, in verse 11, it's positive, and in light of verse 10, that's just talked about being delivered from the coming tribulation, this reference must be to Christ coming for His church in the rapture. And of course, throughout the Book of Revelation, there is a reference to Jesus'

coming, either, in this case, His coming for His saints before the tribulation, in many other cases His coming, as we'll see at the end of the tribulation, in the second coming, when His feet will land on the Mount of Olives.

But notice what He says, ““In light of My soon coming,”” verse 11, ““hold fast what you have, so that no one will take your crown.”” This is a command to keep on persevering in the faith. Look at ““hold fast.”” I love that expression. It means to hold on to something. The Greek lexicon defines it this way, to hold on to something so that it isn't taken away, ““hold fast.”” It's in the present tense in the Greek language, it implies continual constant effort, keep on holding on so that what you have isn't taken away, maintain your faithfulness.

Now, what's ““what you have,”” ““hold fast to what you have””? That's probably a reference to what Christ said they had just a few verses before, their diligence to keep Christ's word, their refusal to deny His name. Keep on holding on. But notice, He adds a warning in verse 11, ““hold fast what you have, so that no one will take your crown.”” That is a remarkable statement. Jesus says, if they stop being faithful to Him and His word, they would lose their reward. Christ says, I will take away the crown that you would have received if you are disqualified in the end. Reminds me of 1 Corinthians 9 where Paul says, you know, “I discipline my body so that I'm not disqualified.” Paul had had a lot of ministry, a lot of years of faithfulness, but he recognized that he could still be disqualified, he could still lose his reward. So Christ says, hold fast to your faithfulness, we will come back to that in a moment, keep on persevering.

That brings us to the third part of this letter, and that is, its conclusion, which is an exhortation to each believer in verses 12 and 13. It begins with a call to overcome, verse 12, ““He who overcomes.”” You remember, I've mentioned this to you each time, but let me just say it again for those who are our guests. In John's writings an overcomer is not some elite, sort of seal Christian, it's a true believer who just keeps on believing. First John 5:4 and 5, “whatever is born of God overcomes the world;” all you have to do is be born of God, “and this is the victory which has overcome the world – our faith.” You just have to keep on believing in Christ. “Who is the one who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God.?” If those verses describe you, you're an overcomer and these promises are for you. Every believer

is an overcomer. Folks, that means every single believer will inherit all of the promises made in all seven of these letters to those who overcome. But the specific promise that Christ makes in each letter is tailored, crafted to the believers and circumstances in that particular church.

Notice what the promise to overcomers, to true believers, what those promises are in Philadelphia. And again, these weren't just to them. If you're a believer, these are to you. Notice what Christ promises. First of all, believers will become a permanent fixture in God's presence. Look at verse 12, ""He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God."" A pillar, of course, pictures stability, permanence. But what is ""the temple of My God.""? You remember, Revelation ends by telling us that in the new earth there is no temple, in the new Jerusalem, there's no temple, chapter 21 verse 22, "because the Lord and the Lamb are its temple." So the picture of a pillar in the temple here is just a metaphor for being in a stable permanent place in Christ's eternal kingdom.

Now again, think about this city. These believers lived in a city where there was very little stability and permanence because of the frequent earthquakes and the economic disasters. Their lives were always in upheaval and turmoil because of the persecution they endured. But Christ promised them, and believe He promises us, that He will make all true believers someday like pillars in God's presence. Nothing will unsettle you, nothing will shake you, nothing will change your place, your position, you are secure in Christ and in the presence of God forever.

Notice, in verse 12 He says, ""and he will not go out from it anymore."" Again, remember the history of this city, after the earthquake in 17 A.D. many of the people moved outside the city and built temporary dwellings there. Jesus is saying, look, in My city that's never going to happen, it's not going to happen, you're going to have permanent security inside the city of God. They would never again be forced from their homes. This is such a powerful reminder, isn't it, that here our lives are marked by upheaval, danger, uncertainty. We live in hard and difficult times. But in Christ's kingdom, believers, we will enjoy permanent security and stability. You'll be like a pillar that never moves in the presence of God Himself.

Christ says, believers will receive a new name. Christ promises He will write on every believer three new names. First of all, He says, verse 12, ""I will write on him the name of My God."" Now in the Old Testament, God placed His name on the Israelites, marking them as belonging

to Him. For example, Deuteronomy 28:10, “all the peoples of the earth will see that you are called by the name of the LORD.” In Revelation we’re going to see that unbelievers, alive during the tribulation, are marked on their forehead. With what? The mark of the beast. But God’s people are marked with His name. Revelation 14:1, look at it, Revelation 14:1, notice what he says, “Then I looked, and behold, the Lamb was standing on Mount Zion, and with Him one hundred and forty-four thousand,” notice this, “having His name and the name of His Father written on their foreheads.”

Look at Revelation 22:4. Now we fast forward to the new heaven and the new earth, and it says “they will see His face, and His name will be on their foreheads.” What does that mean? What’s the significance of that? To have God’s name written on you means that you are marked as belonging to Him. You are His, you’re His child, you share His character, and nothing is going to change that reality.

The second name, Jesus says he’s going to give, notice verse 12 back in our text, He says, I’m also going to write on you ““the name of the city of My God, the new Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God.””” This imagery is likely borrowed from the Roman practice of citizenship in which you belonged to a specific city and your citizenship was tied to that city. You remember, again and again, Paul is called Paul of Tarsus. Why? Because his Roman citizenship was tied to that town, to that community. And we’re going to be marked with a new name, identified with a new city, the new Jerusalem. You remember, again, this city’s history? Philadelphia had changed its name twice, to Neocaesarea, to Flavia, both times to honor the emperor. Christ says, He’s going to give us a new name that will identify our permanent citizenship as belonging to the new Jerusalem, the capital city of the new earth that He makes.

Beloved, we are citizens of an eternal city, the city of God. Christ promises true believers in verse 12 that He will give us a third name, ““and I’ll write on them My new name.””” In Revelation 19:12 Christ is described like this at the second coming, “His eyes are like a flame of fire, and on His head are many diadems; and He has a name written on Him which no one knows except Himself.” People ask me, so what is the name? It seems pretty obvious. The answer is, of course, I don’t know, and neither does anyone else. The point isn’t the identity of

the new name or even its meaning. That's not the point. The main point is, folks, it's Christ's new name and we will wear it too, we will be His.

You remember, at the end of His high priestly prayer in John 17:24 He says, "Father, I desire that they also, whom You have given Me," we belong to Him, "the ones You've given Me, be with Me where I am, so that they may see My glory which You have given Me, for You loved Me before the foundation of the world." Christ said, you love Me and I love You Father, and I love those whom You've given Me and I want them to be with Me. Someday there'll be no doubt whose you are, believer, Christ will write on you His new name and you will be His forever. We will eternally belong to Him.

So Christ has promised us that we will become permanent fixtures in God's presence for eternity and we will receive three new names, a name that shows we belong to God the Father, a name that shows we are permanent citizens of an eternal city, the new Jerusalem, and a name that shows we belong eternally to Jesus Christ. Christ finishes with a call to listen in verse 13, "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches." This is a challenge to everyone who hears or reads these letters to pay close attention to what the Spirit is continually saying to all the churches and to everyone who reads this through His word. It's a call to every Christian and every church to hear this letter. Let me ask you tonight, have you heard this letter? Have you heard what Christ wants to teach you? What is that? How can we reduce this letter to its enduring lessons? Let me just give you two of them.

These are the lessons from the church at Philadelphia. Lesson number one, what matters most to Christ is faithfulness to Him and His word, not outward success. You will be evaluated Christian, not on your successes, because you had nothing to do with them. Anything you achieve is the work of God. That's why Paul says in the early chapters of Corinthians, he says, listen, I planted and Apollos watered, but we don't get any credit for that, God is the only one who can cause growth. And the same thing is true in our lives. The only good things, the only real successes we have, God did them.

So how is God going to evaluate us? The answer is, one thing, well, two things. One is our faithfulness and the other is our motives. How do I know that? Look at 1 Corinthians, 1 Corinthians 4. It's exactly what Paul says. First Corinthians 4, he says, verse 1, "Let a man

regard us in this manner, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God.” He said, that’s my role as a church leader, I’m just a steward of God’s mysteries. That’s what I’m trying to do tonight, just be a faithful steward of the mysteries of God and His word. What’s required in this case? “It’s required of stewards that one be found trustworthy.” That is, loyal to our Master and dependable in our duties. That’s trustworthy, loyal to our Master and dependable in our duties. That’s all Christ asks.

And, that you do it for the right reason. Verse 5, he says, “when the Lord comes He will bring to light the motives of men’s hearts.” So, just be trustworthy. Be loyal to Christ, to His word, and to the duties He’s assigned you. That’s all He asks. And do it because of Him and not because of you. It’s pretty straightforward.

Secondly, we must persevere faithfully to the very end of life to keep our reward. You know, the believers in Philadelphia had been faithful. How do I know? I mean, Christ says they were, He had nothing bad to say about this church. They had kept Christ’s word. They had not denied His name. But do you hear what Christ says to them? If they failed to hold fast to what they had and if they stopped before their race was over, they risked losing their reward.

Let me just say to you, this is sobering to me and it ought to be to you. It doesn’t matter how long you’ve been a Christian. It doesn’t matter how long you’ve been faithful to Christ and to His word and how long you’ve not denied His name. You’ve never gone beyond being disqualified and losing your reward. And so to hear Christ’s word, “““hold fast what you have,””” keep on enduring in faithfulness. Keep His word, obey His word, fulfill the duties He’s given you. Live in love and loyalty to Him, waiting for His return. And don’t stop until the day you take your last breath or Christ returns. That’s the lesson of the church in Philadelphia. It’s one of enduring faithfulness. And you know what? You don’t have to be great, showy, powerful, influential, important, well known, all you have to be is known to Christ as one who is faithful. Let’s pray together.

Father, thank You for the powerful lessons that we learn from these churches. Thank You for the lesson of the church in Philadelphia. A church that was small, insignificant, not impressive, to men, but impressive to our Lord. Father, help us to care about the things that matter to Christ. Lord, give each of us who know Him a commitment to keep on holding fast to what we have.

May we continue to keep His word, to obey His word, to live lives of loyalty to Him, not denying His name. And to do it not for ourselves, for our own glory, but for Him, knowing that He sees and He has made some amazing promises to us. May we, like He did, may we endure the difficulties and troubles of this life, the trials set before us, for the joy of “well done, good and faithful servant.” We pray in Jesus’ name, amen.