

## **Seven Churches pt 6 3-25-01**

### Philadelphia

We have come to the 6<sup>th</sup> church, Philadelphia. If you look at a map of Asia at the time the letters were written you will notice that the letters progress from the closest church to Patmos, Ephesus, and go in a circular clockwise direction in order. Philadelphia, like Smyrna, does not have any faults mentioned. This is a word of encouragement to them. The name Philadelphia means 'brotherly love'. So let's look at the text and see the application to us today and perhaps find in it God's encouragement to us.

Rev 3:7 (NIV)<sup>7</sup> "To the angel of the church in Philadelphia write: These are the words of him who is holy and true, who holds the key of David. What he opens no one can shut, and what he shuts no one can open.

Unlike the other introductions of the speaker, these descriptions are not found in chapter one. In Revelation 19 we find the name of Jesus on his thigh "Faithful and True". Here He says the words come from the One who is holy and true. Holiness and utter truthfulness are two-edged swords. To those who are receptive to holiness and truth those things are a beautiful comfort and encouragement. To the rebellious they are warning of impending justice. Since Philadelphia is an assembly receptive to the Lord Jesus and what his Spirit directs imagine the comfort of knowing the One you serve is holy. There is none like Him. You serve utter purity, undefiled in any way. He is light and in Him is no darkness at all. He will never mislead or deceive you.

And He is True. Truth and faithfulness are twins in Scripture. He will never fail you, cannot lie to you, his promises cannot fail, his word is entirely reliable. Is there anyone – anything else that can compare? No there is none! On the contrary to serve anyone or thing else is to hang your hopes on the impure, the changeable, the undependable, the deceitful. But the word true here in Greek is not the opposite of false which is *alethes* but *alethinos* which means real as opposed to what is a copy or a shadow. Jesus is reality! All other gods are not real – they fade away – for there is no lasting substance to them. To know Jesus is to know reality. What a great comfort to know our Lord Jesus is holy and true!

He holds the key of David. Now what could that mean? You know David was the first good King – or authority – over the people of God. God gave him a promise that his seed would reign forever. Jesus is the fulfillment of that promise. It is his authority that is eternal. Keys also represent authority. You have a key to your home because of the title ( or agreement ) you have. There is right of possession with that key. Even today in realty the possessor of the key to a home has certain rights. Jesus has the rights over the church that He purchased with his own blood. He providentially decides what opportunities He will open to her and what situations she will not have to face. To me that is a great comfort. Our days are decided by our Lord, who loved us and gave Himself for us. He orchestrates all our circumstances; they are his to decide. And do you know what his desire is? It is for you to be his spotless, radiant bride. Every circumstance is toward that end. We will see that in the promise at the end of this passage. If you are His then that is your hearts desire, to be what delights his heart.

Rev 3:8 (NIV)<sup>8</sup> I know your deeds. See, I have placed before you an open door that no one can shut. I know that you have little strength, yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name.

Again Jesus mentions the deeds of this assembly, this time in a positive light. Jesus tells them He is fully aware of their sacrificial obedience. Many times the true children of God give and serve in secret, yet God who sees in secret will reward them openly. He sees!

The letter does not tell us what this open door is. We might think it is some opportunity to reach out to the people of Philadelphia and the towns nearby with the love of Jesus, but we really don't know. Philadelphia was originally founded to spread the Greek culture and language to other cities and was very successful. Perhaps this open door is the opportunity to do what the Greeks had done with the Gospel of Jesus.

Jesus also tells them He knows they have little strength. He doesn't blame them for that, He just says He is aware of it. In the body there are fellowships that are strong in faith, strong in the Word, perhaps because of opportunities they Lord has blessed them with. This particular fellowship is not so strong. Jesus just says He understands their condition. It is not about how strong we are but what we do with the strength given to us. With that little strength they have clung to God's word and did not deny His name.

As with all cities under Rome's influence the temptation to escape affliction through denying Christ was an ever-present temptation. Even though they had little strength – it was hard for them – they did not deny Jesus' name. If their calling is related to the description of Christ – holy and true – then they were staying faithful to their calling. They were separated to God and true to his word and name.

1Corinthians 10:13 says that, "God does not test us beyond what we are able but with every temptation provides a way to escape that we might be able to bear it." He knows how strong we are and those situations that He allows to come our way are relative to our condition. When we are faithful by his grace, even though weak – He takes note of it. That is encouraging! Especially when we are tempted to think no one knows how hard the trial we have faced has been. Some One knows!

Rev 3:9 (NIV)<sup>9</sup> I will make those who are of the synagogue of Satan, who claim to be Jews though they are not, but are liars--I will make them come and fall down at your feet and acknowledge that I have loved you.

We have seen before that this synagogue of the Adversary is the Jewish people who would not receive the Messiah. In the first century they were the worst adversaries of the church. They claimed to be Jewish, but really a Jew is one whose heart is circumcised and their hearts were not. Their words must have stung, especially those who were formerly of their synagogue. They probably called them reprobates, forsaking the faith of their fathers, outcasts from God. But Jesus promised those so called Jews would one day see and acknowledge that it is this band of loving people that believe in Jesus who are the loved of God. If it happened in that age or in the one to come we don't know, but we can be sure it did or will happen.

Today too, people mock believers, and that mocking is on the increase. "God's special people! Ha! Those hypocrites!" But the truth is still the truth – He loves us. You know what? He even delights in us. He sees the finished product, the bride ready for the marriage, pure and spotless. And that is what we need to see to with eyes of faith. David says in Ps 16:3 NIV "As for the saints who are in the land they are the glorious ones in whom is all my delight." We delight in our God, and sing of Him, but our desire is that He feels the same toward us, and He does. Zephaniah prophesied, 3:17 "The LORD your God is with you, he is mighty to save. **He will take great delight in you**, he will quiet you with his love, **he will rejoice over you with singing.**" Yes, we are the beloved of God whether they acknowledge it or not, all because of the work of our husband, Jesus!

Rev 3:10 (NIV)<sup>10</sup> Since you have kept my command to endure patiently, I will also keep you from the hour of trial that is going to come upon the whole world to test those who live on the earth.

Since you have then I will... They endured patiently. This is one of the hardest things to do, and it can only be done because of love for our groom. The bride is waiting while He has gone to prepare a place for her. He is taking his time because He wants her to be complete, but here we are waiting. Some give up and fall asleep like the last letter Sardis. Their lamps no longer trimmed, the oil has run out. They gave up waiting and the lure of the world dragged them away from their readiness and they no longer wait. But not the church of Philadelphia, they are waiting patiently, enduring his molding hand, patiently. Because of that they are going to be kept from a great trial. This may be a period of Roman persecution, or it may refer to the Great Tribulation. The point is they were enduring patiently to their limit and needed no further trials, so Jesus promised to spare them from the coming trial. Again, He knows what we have endured, what we need and what we don't need. They must have felt they were at the end of their limit and needed to hear that no further testing was necessary for they had already learned its product – perseverance. (Heb 2:18) "Because he himself has suffered and been tempted he is able to help those who are tempted".

Rev 3:11 (NIV)<sup>11</sup> I am coming soon. Hold on to what you have, so that no one will take your crown.

Did you know you can earn and then lose your crown? James 1:12 "Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him." They had stood the test, the crown was theirs, but they need to hold on now so that it will not be taken. How can it be taken? We don't have an exact picture of that in Scripture. But we do know how not to lose it – hold on to it. 2:25 says the same thing. Cling to your faith, feed it! Don't let it slip, or fall asleep. Finish strong! Keep your expectation for the sound of the trumpet that announces the arrival of the groom, fresh, alive, and expectant.

There is another reason to cling to our faith that is evident from Smyrna and Philadelphia's history. They are the only two that still to this day have believers present out of the seven cities addressed. Philadelphia was a free Christian city well into the 14<sup>th</sup> century, after all the cities around it had fallen to Muslim occupation. We persevere for those who are to follow us. Our actions have far reaching consequences.

I noticed that it says "no one". Often it is a person that is the greatest temptation or distraction from our hope. Don't let anyone come between you and Christ, or take the place of Christ and a living relationship with Him.

Rev 3:12 (NIV)<sup>12</sup> Him who overcomes I will make a pillar in the temple of my God. Never again will he leave it. I will write on him the name of my God and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which is coming down out of heaven from my God; and I will also write on him my new name.

This is the most encouraging verse of this letter. The believer's dream is to be in the manifest presence of Christ. As Jesus put it, "...to receive you unto myself, that where I am, there you may be also." That is the image of the pillar. It is a permanent fixture, it has structural purpose. It can't leave! The city of Philadelphia had an extended period of earthquakes and tremors. Most people lived outside the city during that time. It went on for so long that there was a real sense of insecurity. The meaning of 'to go out no more' would be clear to the Philadelphians as a secure and safe place, unlike their own city.

Upon that pillar – you – is that name of your Master. Just as slaves proudly displayed the name of their master branded in their forehead, (the more important the master, the greater the pride in bearing his name and assurance of complete care) so we will have upon us the name of our God. In addition we will have the name of the family, the city of which we are an integral part, and the new name of Jesus upon us! Twice in its history, the city of Philadelphia was honored by changing the name to that of the Emperor. Once it was called Neocaesarea and once Flavia. They understood the honor of having the name of a great one bestowed upon them. The world will receive the name of the Antichrist on their foreheads to their shame. We receive the name of our God forever marking us as his bride, his servants, his own.

Rev 3:13 (NIV)<sup>13</sup> He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

Hear this encouraging word. Persevere! Cling to your crown. Stay ready and expectant. Look at the honor awaiting you, loved of God, to be forever in the presence of the One who delights himself in you, who quiets you with his love, and sings over you. Too good to be true, to be real? No! He made it possible and He is reality! Cling to Him!