

Our next city on this circular route through the region is the city of brotherly love, Philadelphia. As with each letter, the messenger/elder of the church that speaks that week is addressed as the recipient. The city of Philadelphia was the youngest of the cities. It sat on an 800 foot high hill overlooking the road that was a gateway from the Hermus Valley up to the central plateau. It was named after the founder, Attalus II, who demonstrated a strong love for his brother. It was a center of Greek culture and so successful in spreading it that Greek completely replaced the language of the Lydians. Like most of these cities that are addressed, it had very strong ties with Rome.

Jesus used a unique self-description that has to do with His message. It's a description that goes beyond that mentioned in chapter one. ⁷ *"And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write: 'The words of the holy one, the true one, who has the key of David, who opens and no one will shut, who shuts and no one opens.'"* Jesus says He is **the holy one**. During His ministry the demons recognized Him as such. One cried out saying, "I know who You are, the Holy One of God." (Mark 1:24) Peter declared Jesus to be the Holy One of God. (John 6:69) The Holy One of the Old Testament is the Lord God. (2Kings 19:22; Proverbs 9:10) Holy is to be set apart for God, but it is also used in the sense of "otherness". Jesus is not just any man. He was with God in the beginning. All things were made by Him. (John 1:3) He is not a created being. He is the pure and undefiled holy Creator.

Jesus also referred to Himself as **the True One**. Once again we have a divine description, as the Scriptures declare, "Let God be true and every man a liar." (Romans 3:4) In 19:11 Jesus has the name, Faithful and True. John recorded in His Gospel that Jesus told us He is the way, the truth, and the life. (John 14:6) We have our perceptions of truth. He is true. A lie is evil because it is inconsistent with the One that is holy and true. He is true in the sense of be the authentic thing. The world and its deceptions are passing and are often an illusion, but Jesus is the real and eternal One.

The third description may line up with what was said in chapter one. Jesus is the one **who has the key of David**. In the first chapter the keys Jesus said He possessed were the keys of Death and Hades. (1:18) Keys represent authority. The one that possesses the keys has the authority. Even today in landlord and tenant situation, the possession of the keys has certain rights. King David was the greatest earthly king of Israel. To have the rights of the greatest king, and those rights being applied to Death and Hades, means that Jesus has the authority over death and judgment. This is affirmed in other Scriptures. Before He ascended He said all authority was in His hands. (Matthew 28:18)

Commented [notes1]: Mark 1:24 (ESV)

²⁴ "What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are - the Holy One of God."

Commented [notes2]: John 6:69 (ESV)

⁶⁹ and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God."

Commented [notes3]: 2 Kings 19:22 (ESV)

²² "Whom have you mocked and reviled? Against whom have you raised your voice and lifted your eyes to the heights? Against the Holy One of Israel!"

Commented [notes4]: Proverbs 9:10 (ESV)

¹⁰ The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight.

Commented [notes5]: John 1:3 (ESV)

³ All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made.

Commented [notes6]: Romans 3:4 (ESV)

⁴ By no means! Let God be true though every one were a liar, as it is written, "That you may be justified in your words, and prevail when you are judged."

Commented [notes7]: Revelation 19:11 (ESV)

¹¹ Then I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse! The one sitting on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war.

Commented [notes8]: John 14:6 (ESV)

⁶ Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

Commented [notes9]: Revelation 1:18 (ESV)

¹⁸ and the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades.

Commented [notes10]: Matthew 28:18 (ESV)

¹⁸ And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.

With these keys Jesus opens and shuts and no one can do anything about it. His decisions are the final decisions.

So what did this description mean to the church of Philadelphia? Like Smyrna, they had nothing for which Jesus needed to rebuke them. This church represented Jesus' holy example to the city. (1Peter 2:12) Certainly they were sinners like all men, but there was no glaring sin in which the church as a whole was compromising. What He is about to tell them is true, completely dependable. His possession of the keys says they can trust Him with their lives and in death. They can count on what He says. If He opens a door for them, all the forces in this world and the spiritual realm can't shut it. (Isaiah 43:13)

⁸ "I know your works. Behold, I have set before you an open door, which no one is able to shut. I know that you have but little power, and yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name. Many of the letters begin with the obvious fact that Jesus knows their works. (1Peter 1:17) He knows what they are doing. For some of the churches, that was warning that He is aware of the way they are going about things. For others it was both a warning and an encouragement. For Smyrna and Philadelphia it was an encouragement for their works came out of a heart that was seeking to do God's will at the leading of the Holy Spirit. If Jesus began to address you by saying, "I know your works!" Would you be in dread or be comforted?

With that divine and kingly authority that belongs to Jesus, He tells the church that He has opened a door for them. We don't know what that was, but when they heard it, they must have understood. It may have been an opportunity to evangelize the central plateau. We know from Ephesians 2:10 that God has prepared in advance good works for us to do. Because God is outside of time, He can see who will be fit for service and place them where they can advance the kingdom of God as they yield to the Holy Spirit. I think of this when we ask ourselves why there are not more souls coming to Christ. God places the lambs where they will faithfully be fed. If you want to see more people come to the Lord, learn to obey the Holy Spirit and be the person that He can use, holy, focused on Him, knowing the Scriptures, and placing Him first in everything. **Doing comes out of being.** If our heart is wholly devoted to the Lord and sensitive to His Spirit, and if we have prepared ourselves by faithful study of the Word, then the sheep that are hungry will be sent to us to be discipled.

We have had open doors placed before us because we cooperated with the Spirit in being the people God called us to be. God uniquely equipped us and placed us here. (Acts 17:26) Could we have been given more had we been even more cooperative with His Spirit? Probably! This applies to us individually and as a church. **Our heart should always long to become all that God intends for us to be.**

Jesus said that He was aware of their limited power. Certainly this can't be spiritual power, for if you have Jesus, you have all the power you need. Some churches had

Commented [notes11]: 1 Peter 2:12 (ESV)

¹² Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.

Commented [notes12]: Isaiah 43:13 (ESV)

¹³ Also henceforth I am he; there is none who can deliver from my hand; I work, and who can turn it back?"

Commented [notes13]: 1 Peter 1:17 (ESV)

¹⁷ And if you call on him as Father who judges impartially according to each one's deeds, conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile,

Commented [notes14]: Ephesians 2:10 (ESV)

¹⁰ For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

Commented [notes15]: Acts 17:26 (ESV)

²⁶ And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place,

influential members of the community in their midst. They had a certain power that comes with that influence. They could push back against persecution and share with others in places of authority. I believe that what Jesus is saying here is that they are a church made up mostly of slaves and common people. That has both advantages and disadvantages. They can't influence the culture as easily. But on the other hand, they are the most common type of people and can therefore more easily reach a greater number of people.

They only had a little power, but they had kept Jesus' word and had not denied His name. (Matthew 10:33) This is a "no compromise" church. They received the words of Jesus and clung to them. "Kept" means to continue to have in one's possession, but it also means to obey. They had obeyed the words of Jesus.

They did not deny Jesus' name. Jesus is Lord. They hadn't succumbed to pressure to worship Caesar. Nor had they denied Jesus' name by the way that they lived. Their testimony was consistent. Both our words and our example are involved in not denying His name. There are so many today that mock Christianity with the label "hypocrite". Sometimes it is not deserved, but sadly, many times it is. We can deny the name of Jesus by the selfish example we set. (James 1:22)

⁹ Behold, I will make those of the synagogue of Satan who say that they are Jews and are not, but lie—behold, I will make them come and bow down before your feet and they will learn that I have loved you. We saw the synagogue of Satan before in the letter to Smyrna (2:9). Paul told us that *²⁸ For no one is a Jew who is merely one outwardly, nor is circumcision outward and physical. ²⁹ But a Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter. His praise is not from man but from God.* Romans 2:28-29 (ESV) He taught that a Jew is a child of faith, for Abraham is the father of faith. (Romans 4:11-12) The church of Philadelphia must have been deeply wounded by the insults of the Jews in that city. In the latter half of the first century the Jews persecuted the church. The opposite would be true in later centuries, but during the time of Jesus' letter, the local synagogue often tried to get the church in trouble. There would be a natural resentment when they lost Jews to the Christian Church, along with a desire to retaliate.

The synagogue must have been claiming that God really loved them because they could prove their lineage from Abraham and that God was not pleased with the church because it included Gentiles. Jesus promised to humble those Jews who were not circumcised in heart. They would soon be coming to bow before the feet of those in the church. We don't have any historical record of this or know how it came about, but we can be sure that God did it in His own time and way. Sometimes the Psalmist prayed that God would vindicate him in the eyes of his enemies. (Psalm 86:17) There are times in life when God does this and other times when He leaves it to the final judgment. It is encouraging when the vindication comes in this life. This church must have needed it.

Commented [notes16]: Matthew 10:33 (ESV)

³³ but whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven.

Commented [notes17]: James 1:22 (ESV)

²² But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.

Commented [notes18]: Revelation 2:9 (ESV)

⁹ I know your tribulation and your poverty (but you are rich) and the slander of those who say that they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan.

Commented [notes19]: Romans 4:11-12 (ESV)

¹¹ He received the sign of circumcision as a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised. The purpose was to make him the father of all who believe without being circumcised, so that righteousness would be counted to them as well,
¹² and to make him the father of the circumcised who are not merely circumcised but who also walk in the footsteps of the faith that our father Abraham had before he was circumcised.

Commented [notes20]: Psalm 86:17 (ESV)

¹⁷ Show me a sign of your favor, that those who hate me may see and be put to shame because you, LORD, have helped me and comforted me.

¹⁰ *Because you have kept my word about patient endurance, I will keep you from the hour of trial that is coming on the whole world, to try those who dwell on the earth.* They had listened to the Spirit and patiently endured the hardship it faced in Philadelphia. It was because of their patient endurance in obedience to Jesus that they would be spared what was coming. Once again we can only speculate what this was in reference to. It may have been the persecution of Domitian. (81-96 A.D.)

Some would say this passage confirms the pre-tribulation rapture. I think there a number of other verses that would be more applicable. The original recipients would not have taken it in that light, and if they did, it would have been misunderstood. The original meaning had something to do with trouble in their day. We can take the lesson from it that God is able to keep us from our hour of trial. If we, like this church, are focused on being the people God has called us to be, then we may also be delivered from the trying times in our world. I know of some who heeded the call years ago to be debt free and prepare for a time of economic hardship. They listened to what the Spirit of God was saying, got out of debt, set some money aside, and were spared from some of the consequences of the economic downturn.

God will not always spare us from trials, or we would never mature into believers whose roots are deep and who walk by faith. Trials are good for us. They cause us to grow. It is during times of tribulation that we draw closest to the Lord. Whether God spares you from the trial or you experience it with His presence to help and guide you, you can thank the Lord for them. (James 1:2)

¹¹ *I am coming soon. Hold fast what you have, so that no one may seize your crown.* Jesus said that He is coming soon in the letter to Pergamum (2:16). We have had several people who suddenly found that their health was not as good as they thought. Life is very fragile. Whether Christ returns tomorrow or in a thousand years, He is coming soon for each of us. That is why we must hold fast to what we have. (2:25) We will be seeing Him face to face and we don't want to be ashamed. (Daniel 12:2) We want our entrance into the heavenly kingdom to be richly welcomed. (2Peter 1:11) Life is short and eternity is a long, long time. We need to remind ourselves of that fact.

The one that would seize your crown is the enemy of your soul. He doesn't want to see you hold fast to the end, and he'll do everything he is permitted to do to snatch it from you. That crown is your reward for faithfulness. It is the only thing of value that you can present to the Lord in gratitude for all He has done for you. (4:10) God allows Satan to go so far to strengthen your faith and help you mature. But if in that process you give in to your flesh and quit holding tight to the promises of God, you will find yourself slipping back into the old life of being faithless toward your Redeemer and Savior. The enemy will snatch that crown of faithfulness the first chance he gets. Hold fast. It won't be that long! Don't let the snake steal your crown.

Commented [notes21]: James 1:2 (ESV)

² Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds,

Commented [notes22]: Revelation 2:16 (ESV)

¹⁶ Therefore repent. If not, I will come to you soon and war against them with the sword of my mouth.

Commented [notes23]: Revelation 2:25 (ESV)

²⁵ Only hold fast what you have until I come.

Commented [notes24]: Daniel 12:2 (ESV)

² And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.

Commented [notes25]: 2 Peter 1:11 (ESV)

¹¹ For in this way there will be richly provided for you an entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Commented [notes26]: Revelation 4:10 (ESV)

¹⁰ the twenty-four elders fall down before him who is seated on the throne and worship him who lives forever and ever. They cast their crowns before the throne, saying,

¹² The one who conquers, I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God. Never shall he go out of it, 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 from my God out of heaven, and my own new name. At the end of each letter there is a promise to the conquerors. These are the ones who hear and obey. They believe in the name of Jesus. They overcome Satan by the blood of the Lamb and the word of their testimony. (12:11) They hold fast until Jesus comes. To these the Lord gives various promises that encourage them to endure through the temptations and trials.

It is to these that Jesus promises to make them a pillar in the temple of God, which is a fixture before the presence of God for ever and ever. (21:2) They will never need to leave His glorious presence. (Psalm 15:1) And as the angels before the throne are overwhelmed again and again with the holiness of God, so these that conquer will live in awe-struck wonder of His glory. It is way beyond the realm of our present daily experience, and so words are insufficient to describe how wonderful that will be.

The conqueror will have the name of God, the holy city, and Jesus' new name written on him or her. Slaves in the Roman era had the name of their master tattooed into their forehead. If you were owned by a particularly influential person, like a senator or even the Caesar, when you went to market, people got out of your way. No one dared to cheat you. The name of your master gave you authority. When we get there, and I'm speaking to all who will overcome by faith in Jesus, Jesus will personally write these names on your forehead. You will forever belong to the heavenly city. You will forever be a servant of the Living God and of Jesus. Jesus will honor you with the name of God and His own new name. Once again I struggle to find the words to convey the wonder of this concept.

It is to forever belong, to be home, to be loved, to be honored, to be valued, respected, and so much more. It is happily ever after only much better. It is to possess joy unspeakable and full of glory without end. It is the longing buried deep within our hearts that we almost dare not hope for because of its magnitude. (1Corinthians 2:9)

¹³ He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. This church heard and held fast up to the 14th century. Do you hear how God can set before a powerless church open doors that no man can shut? Do you hear how He can make those who slander you come and bow at your feet and recognize you are loved by God? Do you hear how those who keep the word of His patience will be kept during the hour of trial? Do you hear the call to hold fast and not let anyone seize your crown? And finally, do you hear the promise to those who conquer, the wonder of forever being in the presence of God and honored with His name, the name of New Jerusalem and the new name of Jesus written upon you? Are you listening with your heart? I pray for us all to have ears to hear.

Commented [notes27]: Revelation 12:11 (ESV)

¹¹ And they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death.

Commented [notes28]: Revelation 21:2 (ESV)

² And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.

Commented [notes29]: Psalm 15:1 (ESV)

¹ O LORD, who shall sojourn in your tent? Who shall dwell on your holy hill?

Commented [notes30]: 1 Corinthians 2:9 (ESV)

⁹ But, as it is written, "What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him"

Questions

- 1 Go over Jesus three self-descriptions.
- 2 Which two churches were without rebuke?
- 3 What did Jesus do for them?
- 4 Where do works originate?
- 5 With little power what did they do?
- 6 Has God ever vindicated you?
- 7 Why was God going to keep them from the hour of trial?
- 8 What was the warning?
- 9 What is the promise?
- 10 Do you have ears to hear?