

Jesus' Letter To The Church At Philadelphia

Text : **Revelation 3: 7-13** (cf.- I Pet. 1: 3-9)

INTRODUCTION :

A. Few churches are worthy of only praise, but the church in Philadelphia was.

1. Most are a mixture of good, bad, and indifferent qualities.
2. But, the letter to the church in Philadelphia was purely praise from our Lord.
3. It received the review from Jesus that every church would like to receive.
“You’re doing great; .. just keep up the good work.”
4. It was a church with a sense of purpose in a city that was built for a purpose.
 - a. When born into Christ, everyone brings something of himself into the church.
 - b. The key is to screen out all of the negative qualities while retaining the good.
 - c. One of the good qualities retained in Philadelphia was their sense of mission.

B. Why does our city exist today ?

1. Did someone say we need a city there to ... ?
2. Most cities just sort of happen. People start settling there and it grows.
3. Philadelphia was built with a purpose ... to be a mission city.

C. Philadelphia two completely peaceful purposes. (*Not as most, military*)

1. King Attalus II of Pergamos built to honor his brother, Eumeses II.
 - a. Attalus had an unusually close relationship with his brother.
 - b. Thus, the name “Philadelphia.” (*Nick name of King Attalus .. brother-lover*)
2. The city was also built as a mission city to advance the Greek culture and language.
3. Because of its purpose, Philadelphia was the youngest of the seven cities. (*189 B.C.*)

D. Its location was selected because of its mission. (*Administrative district of Sardis*)

1. Outpost at the boarder of three countries ... Mysia, Lydia, Phrygia
2. On the major road linking Asia with Greece and Europe. (*28 mi. SE of Sardis*)
3. The location had other advantages :
 - a. It was in the most fertile area of the region. (*Grew grapes and made wine*)
 - b. Frequent dustings of volcanic ash kept it fertile.
4. It was built right on an active seismic fault line.
 - a. Each time the volcano fertilized the valley, earthquakes shook the city.
 - b. Earthquakes were very frequent and often severe.

TRANSITION :

As with all of the letters to the churches, the letter to Philadelphia makes reference to their local situation.

I. Vs. 7 This only one of the letters in which Jesus does not identify Himself by His description in chapter one.

A. “He who is holy”

1. Holy refers something that is set aside for God. (*Separated from sin*)
2. God is the only one who is completely set aside from sin.
 - a. God refers to Himself as Holy ... **I Pet. 1: 16** (*Be holy like Me.*)
 - b. The Seraphim of Heaven call Him Holy ... **Isa. 6: 2-3** , **Rev. 4: 8**
 - c. The evil spirits recognize Jesus as Holy ... **Mark 1: 24**
 - d. The prophets spoke of Jesus as Holy ... **Psa. 16: 10**
 - e. The angel told Mary He was to be the Holy One ... **Luke 1: 35**
 - f. The Apostles referred to Jesus as Holy ... **Acts 3: 14, 4: 30**
3. Thus, He is without sin, but with the authority that only God has ... *total sovereignty.*

B. “who is true”

1. Different words in the original language can be translated “**true.**” (*alethinos*)
2. This word means “to be real or genuine.”
3. Many make claims, but Jesus is the only true God.

C. “who has the key of David”

1. To have the keys is to have the authority over.
2. O.T. Reference (*Explain context Vs. 15f*)

Isa. 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.
3. Jesus is the one with the authority over the kingdom.
 - a. **1: 18-** ... I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of death and of Hades.
 - b. **Matt. 28: 18-** And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying,
“All authority has been given to Me in Heaven and on earth. ...”
 - c. Compare ... **Eph. 1: 18-21** , **Col. 2: 9-12**
4. As the one who has the authority to decide all matters for the church, I say this :

II. Vs. 8 I have granted to you an open door which no one can close.**A. "I know your deeds."**

1. God is intimately aware of His church.
2. He knows the potential, because HE put it within us. (*individually & collectively*)
3. He knows what is and what is not being done. (*Blesses productive .. Matt. 25:28*)

B. They are given an opportunity because they have used their ability to serve Him.

1. **"Little power"** ... They were not a powerful church.
 - a. Not rich
 - b. Not many members
 - c. Not rich influential
2. God had not given them much to work with, but He knew how they had used it.

C. When the pressure came, they had stood firm.**1. "have kept My word"**

- a. The N.T. was not yet assembled, but whatever they knew they obeyed.
- b. Jesus knows what we know and how much of what we know is lived in our lives.
- c. ISN'T IT GREAT !! ... you can be assured that God knows how you serve Him.

2. "have not denied My name"

- a. The pressure was on them, but they would not be caused to forsake Him.
- b. All those who do not deny Christ, will be introduced by Him to the Father.
**Matt. 10: 32- Therefore everyone who confesses Me before men,
I will also confess him before My Father who is in Heaven.**

3. There are many ways to deny Christ :

- a. One can deny Christ by keeping silent.
- b. One can deny Christ by the life he lives. (*absence of devotion*)
**Titus 1: 16- They profess to know God, but by their deeds they deny Him,
being detestable and disobedient and worthless for any good deed.**

III. Vs. 9 They did not let Jesus Down and He promises not to let them down.**A. The line of defense indicates the line of attack. (*Illustrate : wall, roof or floor*)**

B. Though primarily a Greek city, they were under pressure from Jews.

1. Synagogue is a word used uniquely to refer to Jewish gathering places.
2. These Jews claim to be the people of God, but they are doing the work of Satan.
 - a. The Jews tried to claim they were the only people of God.
 - b. The Jews tried to relegate Christianity to a rebellious sect of the Jews.
 - c. The church is now the true Israel of God. **Rom. 9**
3. Because the brethren at Philadelphia did not yield, they will be victorious.

IV. Vs. 10-11 They will also be preserved when the great trial comes on the world.**A. The language indicates that this event will happen to the whole inhabited world.**

1. This event is to ascertain the quality of those being tested. (*assayer tests gold*)
2. This is not just for Christians ... whole world.

B. This time of testing was not to be in the distant future.

1. It was something that would affect the Christians in Philadelphia.
2. It was something that would come soon. **"I am coming soon."** (*Not in our day*)

C. Don't stop doing what you are doing. "hold fast what you have," **WHAT ?**

1. They were keeping His word.
2. They were not denying His name. (Thus, **"Keep on keeping on."**)

D. Don't let anyone take **"way your crown."**

1. We know from this that three things are true.
 - a. They had a crown.
 - b. They could lose the crown.
 - c. They had a choice whether or not they kept their crown. (**"hold fast ... so that"**)
2. There are two kinds of crowns.
 - a. The crown worn by a king. (Diadem)
 - b. The crown awarded to the winner of a contest. (Stephanos)
 - c. This is the crown give to the winner, *to the one who overcame a challenge.*
3. The brethren had overcome, but an even greater challenge was coming.
 - a. They were not facing the challenge alone.
 - b. They would only lose if they allowed themselves to be defeated.

V. Vs. 12a The prize goes only to the victors, to the overcomers.

A. Jesus identified Himself as an overcomer.

1. **John 16: 33**- These things I have spoken to you, so that in Me you may have peace.
In the world you have tribulation, but take courage;
I have overcome the world.
2. **Rev. 17:14** -These will wage war against the Lamb, and the Lamb will overcome them, because He is Lord of lords and King of kings, and those who are with Him are the called and chosen and faithful.

B. Jesus assures Christians they will also overcome.

1. We have been given what it takes to be overcomers.
I John 4: 4- You are from God, little children, and have overcome them;
because greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world.
2. Faith is the key to our victory over the world.
I John 5: 5- Who is the one who overcomes the world,
but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?
3. Jesus Himself explains how Christians overcome the worst the world can do.
Rev. 12: 11- And they overcame him because of the blood of the Lamb and because of the word of their testimony, and they did not love their life even when faced with death.

* _ Only the overcomers receive the reward. (*Not like modern games ... no score*)

VI. Vs. 12b What will be the prize ?

A. They will be made a “pillar.” (*Philadelphia was called “Little Athens” = many temples*)

1. A pillar was placed in a pagan temple with the name of those to be greatly honored.
2. Compare :
Gal. 2: 9- recognizing the grace that had been given to me, James and Cephas and John, who were reputed to be pillars, gave to me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship, ...
3. Victorious Christians are honored as pillars in the eternal temple of God in Heaven.

B. The overcomers would be given security.

1. “He will not go out from it anymore;”
2. Those in Philadelphia had to run out of the city to escape earthquakes.
 - a. Great stone structures fell leaving only columns standing.
 - b. Most of the population lived outside the city.

- c. Those who overcome live without fear. *They stay in the eternal city.*

C. Overcomers will be identified as belonging to God.

1. Jesus will write on them His new name, and the name of God.
2. Those who overcome will belong to God. (*Overcoming is emphasized in all 7 letters*)

Note : *People in Philadelphia were familiar with the concept of receiving a new name. When the city was destroyed by an earthquake in 17 a.d. Tiberius Caesar financed the rebuilding so they changed the name to "Neocaesarea" i.e., "The New City of Caesar." When it was again destroyed and rebuilt by Caesar Vespasian, they again changed the name to "Flavia."*

D. Having the name of the "City of God, the New Jerusalem" indicated citizenship.

1. Those who overcome will be welcomed in as citizens in God's holy city.
2. Jesus said He was going to prepare a place for His followers. **John 14: 1-4**
3. Peter assured us that it is already prepared and waiting. **I Pet. 1: 3-9**
4. Paul tells us our citizenship is already in Heaven. **Phil. 3: 20**

**** All overcomers will receive the crown of victory, eternity with God in Heaven.**

CONCLUSION :

A. Vs. 13 This message is for us ... "what the Spirit says to the churches."

B. The question before us is do we have an ear? "He who has an ear, let him hear"

1. Times of testing will come upon all of us.
2. If we remain faithful to the end we will receive the victor's crown.

C. What will the victor's crown be ?

1. He will be a pillar in the heavenly temple of God.
2. God will claim him as His own.
3. He will be a citizen of Heaven.
4. He will be eternally secure.

INVITATION :

A. Are you a victorious overcomer ?

B. Have you even entered the race ?

Lesson Texts :

Revelation 3: 7-13

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: **8** 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. **9** 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. **10** 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. **11** I am coming quickly; hold fast what you have, so that no one will take your crown. **12** 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. **13** He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.’

I Peter 1: 3-6

3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, **4** to *obtain* an inheritance *which is* imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, **5** who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time **6** In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, **7** so that the proof of your faith, *being* more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ; **8** and though you have not seen Him, you love Him, and though you do not see Him now, but believe in Him, you greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, **9** obtaining as the outcome of your faith the salvation of your souls.