

# A WORD TO THE FAITHFUL

---

*Revelation 3:7-13*

## Introduction

Before we go into the message to the church at Philadelphia today, I want to give a bit more of an overview of these messages to the churches. There are a couple of differing views as to how we ought to interpret these messages and their application to the church age in which we live. It is obvious that the message of Jesus Christ in these chapters has a much broader scope than just these seven specific churches that are named.

One of the views on these messages is that they portray a chronological picture of the age of the church.

1. Ephesus (A.D. 30-100)—name means “desirable.” The Apostolic Church.
2. Smyrna (A.D. 100-313)—name means “myrrh.” The Martyr Church.
3. Pergamum (A.D. 314-590)—name means “marriage.” The Compromising Church.
4. Thyatira (A.D. 590-1517)—name means “continual sacrifice.” The Corrupt Church – the Dark Ages.
5. Sardis (A.D. 1517-1700)—name means “remnant.” The Reformation Church.
6. Philadelphia (A.D. 1700-1900)—name means “brotherly love.” The Revival Church.
7. Laodicea (A.D. 1900-present)—name means “people’s rights (justice of the people).” The Worldly Church.

There is certainly some merit in this view, and it is easy to see the chronological picture in history, but there are also problems, such as taking away the importance of the messages that would not be considered applicable to our time in history. It also would make it impossible for readers to understand the true import of the messages until we come to the last part of the church age and are able to look back.

The other view is that the messages provide for us a composite picture of the church age. This means that all seven of the churches, taken and blended together give a complete picture of the church of today, as

they also do of the church of every age. I am personally inclined to hold this view, for certainly in every century of the church, in every time period of the church age, there have been those who have left their first love, many spiritually dead, many lukewarm, but also those persecuted, yet faithful, and those like Philadelphia, who had little strength, yet stood firm.

So I don’t think we can just separate these churches into differing time periods, for we see elements of all the churches in all ages of church history.

This morning we come to the church in Philadelphia. This city, located about 90 miles east of Smyrna, was a relatively modern city compared to some of the others in these chapters. It was established in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC. Philadelphia was a dangerous place to live due the many earthquakes experienced by the region.

Barclay points out another important historical feature about this city and one also alluded to in the statements of this message to the church there. He says:

Philadelphia was founded for a special purpose and with a special intention. It was situated where the borders of Mysia, Lydia and Phrygia met. It was a border town. But it was not as a garrison town that Philadelphia was founded, for there was little danger there. It was founded with the deliberate intention that it might be a missionary of Greek culture and the Greek language to Lydia and Phrygia; and so well did it do its work that by A.D. 19 the Lydians had forgotten their own Lydian language and were all but Greeks...That is what the Risen Christ means when he speaks of the open door that is set before Philadelphia. Three centuries before Philadelphia had been given an open door to spread Greek ideas and Greek culture in the lands beyond; and now there has come to it another great missionary opportunity, an open door to carry to men who never knew it the message of the love of Jesus Christ.

The church in Philadelphia was apparently small with little strength, yet it was a faithful church. There is no word of condemnation or blame for this church. Its problems came from the outside, not inside—no heresy or division.

So let us look at what Christ has to say in his message to this church to this church in Philadelphia.

## I. Identification v. 7

This time the words used by Christ to identify himself are not taken from the description given by John in ch. 1. He uses three terms to identify himself – the Holy One, the True One, the One who has the key of David.

“...the Holy One...” asserts the Savior’s deity as the absolutely righteous One, the One totally set apart from sin. In Isaiah 40:25, *Yahweh* calls Himself “The Holy One.” It is a title of deity and contrasts Him with the claims of Emperor worship.

“...the True One...” “True” is a Greek word which means “the real, the genuine, the ideal,” and stands opposed to what is false and to what is only a picture or type of the real.

The rest of the verse is not a direct quote from the OT, but is a clear reference to Isaiah 22:22:

*“And I will place on his shoulder the key of the house of David. He shall open, and none shall shut; and he shall shut, and none shall open.”*

This message was spoken of Eliakim, a servant of God in Israel, but was clearly also a prophecy concerning Jesus Christ. There is a similar tone in the message of Jesus to Peter in Matt. 16:18-19:

*“And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.”*

The people in the church in Philadelphia needed to know, even as we do today, that the one to whom they had pledged their allegiance was the one who holds the key to the door, and controls the access to the kingdom, and that He is holy and true and will do what is right.

## II. The Message vv. 8-10

There are four important elements in this message to the church in Philadelphia that we need to notice.

### 1. Your strength is not as important as your faithfulness v. 8.

The phrase, “Behold, I have set before you an open door, which no one is able to shut.” is best understood as a parenthesis. What He is really saying is, “I know your works...I know you have but little power, and yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name.” But in the middle of that commendation he reminds them of his purpose for them.

“I have set (placed)...” the idea in this phrase is that of stewardship – being entrusted with something, in this case an open door of opportunity. But the clear message is that because they have already been faithful with the opportunities they have been given, despite their lack of strength or numbers, He has given them more opportunity. This is a principle portrayed throughout Scripture.

Quite a few years ago, we were attending the Missions Conference at PBI. During the conference each year they would honor an alumnus of the school, who was recognized for outstanding service and faithfulness to the Lord. On this particular year they honored a woman who had served many years on the mission field, and had been involved in many different ministry areas. But the interesting thing was that this woman had been crippled her entire life (Polio?). She hobbled onto the stage with crutches strapped to her arms, and gave an optimistic message about faithfulness and service that brought tears to the eyes of everyone there. She refused to yield to her physical weakness, but faithfully served Jesus Christ, and in so doing inspired hope in others.

**Your strength is not as important as your faithfulness.**

### 2. The opposition you are facing is Satanic – v. 9a.

The church in Philadelphia, as many of these churches, was facing serious opposition and even persecution from the Jews. But here Jesus points out that the opposition is really Satanic in nature. They are of the synagogue of Satan. They are not really Jews, even though they may be descendants of Abraham. In Romans 2:28-29 Paul writes, “For a person is not a Jew who is one outwardly, and true circumcision is not something visible in the flesh. On the contrary, a person is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is of the heart—by the Spirit, not the letter. His praise is not from men, but from God.”

So Christ wants us to realize that... "our battle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the world powers of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavens." (Ephesians 6:12)

### 3. **The church of Jesus Christ will not be overlooked – v. 9b.**

There was an expectation among the Jews that the Gentiles would eventually submit to them, and that they would rule over the Gentiles. After all it says in Isaiah 60:14 – "The sons of your oppressors will come and bow down to you; all who reviled you will fall down on their faces at your feet. They will call you the City of the LORD, Zion of the Holy One of Israel."

But Jesus says, no, it is these Jews, who are not really Jews but are of the synagogue of Satan, who will be made to come and bow down... It is to the church that all men, Jew and Gentile alike, must ultimately make their submission, because Christ is the head of the Church, and He is the ruler of all.

### 4. **The Church will not face the same test as the world – v.10.**

Read and discuss briefly the promise in this verse. I believe the Bible is clear that the church will not go through the great time of Tribulation that is described in the rest of the book of Revelation. How will that happen? Paul describes it for us in 1 Thess. 4:15-17.

## III. **The Promise and the Plea vv. 11-13**

Read these verses and comment briefly on the promise of Christ's seal – the new name which will set us apart for eternity. (Rev. 22:3-4)

### **Conclusion**

I would like to conclude by focusing on v. 11. I would like to challenge you with two thoughts. First, the importance of holding fast in the light of Christ's soon return – "I am coming soon. Hold fast..."

[From Illy]... HOLD THE FORT!

During the American Civil War, General William T. Sherman was driving his troops on his decisive march to the sea. He had left behind in a fort on Kennesaw Mountain a small contingent of men to guard the rations. General John Bell Hood of the Confederate Army attacked the fort, and a fierce battle followed. One-third of the men were killed or wounded, and J. M. Corse, the general in command, was severely injured in the fighting. Just as he was about to hoist up the white flag and surrender, a message came

through the signal corps set up on a chain of mountains. General Sherman was within 15 miles of the fort and had sent the message: "Hold fast. We are coming." Those few words so encouraged the defenders that they held on and kept the fort from falling into the hands of their attackers.

Our Commander, the Lord Jesus Christ has also sent us the assurance that He is coming. Jesus said, "I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also" (John 14:2,3). Let's hold the fort!

The second important thought is that there is a prize, a crown, not for those who start with great energy, but for those who finish well. You see, the Christian race is not a competitive event to see who comes in first. It is an endurance run to see who finishes faithfully. There is a great story about a man named Bill Broadhurst that illustrates this well.

[From Illy]... FAITHFUL TO THE FINISH

Bill Broadhurst wanted to be a marathon runner. His hero was Bill Rodgers who was a world-famous distance runner. He entered the Pepsi Challenge 10,000-meter road race in Omaha, Nebraska because he knew that Bill Rodgers was also running in that event. But, ten years earlier, surgery for an aneurysm in the brain had left him paralyzed on his left side. Now, on a misty July morning in 1981, he stands with 1,200 lithe-looking men and women at the starting line. The gun cracks! The crowd surges forward. Bill throws his stiff left leg forward, pivots on it as his right foot hits the ground. His slow plop-plop-plop rhythm seems to mock him as the pack fades into the distance. Sweat rolls down his face, pain pierces his ankle, but he keeps going. Six miles and two hours and twenty-nine minutes later, Bill reaches the finish line. A man approaches from a small group of bystanders. Bill recognizes him from pictures in the newspaper. He's Bill Rodgers, the famous marathon runner. "Here," says Rodgers, putting his newly won medal around Bill's neck. "You've worked harder for this than I have." Broadhurst had also been a winner.

The Apostle Paul said, "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith, In the future, there is reserved for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give me on that day, and not only to me, but to all those who have loved His appearing."

Our numbers may be small, our strength may not be great, but that is not what the Lord is looking at. What he is looking for is faithfulness. If we are faithful, He will open doors of opportunity—doors which no one can shut.