

## **“To Philadelphia: Seize Your Crown”**

*Revelation 3:7-13*

Rev. Min Chung

(Lord’s Day Service, April 23, 2017)

### **Revelation 3:7-13**

<sup>7</sup>“*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.*

<sup>8</sup>“*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.* <sup>9</sup>*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.* <sup>10</sup>*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.* <sup>11</sup>*I am coming soon. Hold fast what you have, so that no one may seize your crown.* <sup>12</sup>*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.* <sup>13</sup>*He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.’”*

### **Introduction**

In Revelation 2 and 3, Jesus writes to seven churches, which represent the universal church throughout history, including the church today. The sixth church, the church of Philadelphia, was faithful to the Lord, and we can learn from this small yet faithful church. We need to be faithful in small segments of our lives so that we can finish the race that is our life. It is not just about doing as much as we can as fast as we can, but having our hearts be burning with a fire that does not go out. We need to have a love for God and love for others so that we can finish the race for the glory of God. There are no perfect churches or Christians, but we can still be faithful.

The church of Philadelphia received no warnings, threats, or judgments. They were driven by character, not success. Philadelphia, located in present-day Turkey in Asia Minor, was a city of commercial importance conveniently located as a gateway to the high central plateau of Asia Minor. The youngest and smallest of the seven churches, Philadelphia receives no rebuke. Like Sardis, Philadelphia suffered widespread damage in an earthquake during the reign of Emperor Tiberius, leading to much insecurity, yet this small church lasted for centuries. They were not perfect, but they were faithful.

### **I. Jesus addresses**

In these letters, when Jesus addresses the church, He gives characteristics of Himself that are appropriate in the context of each individual church. He gives three names in this passage: the holy one, the true one, and the one who holds the key of David.

#### **A. The One who is holy**

This is attributed to *YAHWEH* in the Old Testament, which means “I AM.” Jesus is saying, “I Am God Himself.” The phrase “The Holy One of Israel” is used of *YAHWEH* almost exclusively in Isaiah. This is used here because Jesus will reference Isaiah 22:22. Jesus assumes the role of *YAWWEH*, the true God, and His followers represent true Israel.

‘Holy’ literally means He is the separated one, not just from sin, but completely separated from everything else. He is the only God and the only true creator – everything else is created. God has no opposition, not even Satan. When He calls us to be holy, He calls us to be separated from sin so that we can be separated for God and for His glory.

## **B. The One who is true**

The word ‘true’ here is not used in opposition to false, but means ‘genuine’ or ‘authentic’. Jesus is the only true, authentic God, meaning we are the true Israelites who put our faith in Jesus Christ. He is the only one who opens and shuts the door and only the true Israelites who put their faith in Him will have access to the presence of God.

## **C. The One who retains the key of David**

*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.*

*Matthew 16:19*

*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.*

This name is a reference to Isaiah 22 and a court official named Eliakim, who had the keys to every door in the house of David. He had access to every room, including the treasury. This was a Messianic prophecy pointing forward to Jesus, who has the keys to every room in the kingdom of God. Jesus has the sovereign authority of access to the kingdom and all the treasures and resources of Heaven, and through Jesus Christ alone can we enter the kingdom of God. At the time, Jews were saying that they had the keys to the kingdom, but Jesus refutes their notion. Therefore we pray in Jesus’ name, because in His name every door opens.

In Matthew 16:19, we see this authority is given to the New Testament church; it is given to us in Christ. We as the universal church of Jesus Christ have access to God, and we have the keys to open the door for the people of the world, so people can enter into the presence of God. All authority on heaven and earth has been given to Jesus, and He calls us to use this authority to make disciples of all nations.

Do you worry? Do you fear? It is because you do not trust God or understand that our God is our Heavenly Father because we are in Jesus Christ. God is everything in the universe! Do not worry or fear, but go to the Father. Pray in times of need, because we have this incredible privilege to come before God. Just as my children can call me at any time of day or night, our Heavenly Father always wants to hear us and give us more. Jesus Christ has the key, so pray in His name. Everything we have is in Jesus’ name.

## II. Jesus Encourages

### A. Power

The Philadelphian church had a little power, but does the word 'little' refer to quality or quantity of power? In Greek, the original language, the words 'but' and 'yet' are not present in verse 8. My interpretation is that the Philadelphian church is able to endure, not in spite of, but because of, their little power. The word 'little' is simple in comparison to the big, absolute power of Jesus. We in Jesus Christ, as He releases His power to us, have delegated little power. If we have any power from God, we are able to keep His word. The concept is similar to that of the mustard seed. If we have faith as small as a mustard seed, because God is great and awesome, if He released any power to us, even though our faith is little, we can move the mountains. Any power that He gives to us will sustain us in our faithfulness.

### B. Obedience

They were able to obey because God gave them grace and power, which is also applicable to us.

### C. Loyalty

They were able to keep from denying the name of Jesus, and remained loyal. In those days there were three main kinds of external pressure that lead to denying Jesus' name: emperor worship, Jewish opposition, and internal temptation from false teachers. In the midst of this, because of God's power, the church was able to obey and did not deny the name of Christ.

### D. Endurance

They knew who Jesus is, so they knew what power was available to them. Through the power they received, the Philadelphian church persevered in their walk with God. Grace is everything, and it is available for us in Christ.

## III. Jesus gives privileges

When we are faithful, we receive blessings as He gives us more grace.

### A. Open door

*Matthew 23:13*

*"But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you shut the kingdom of heaven in people's faces. For you neither enter yourselves nor allow those who would enter to go in."*

Many people interpret this phrase as a horizontal open door for ministry or missions. Another way to interpret it is as a vertical open door for access to God. Paul often uses the phrase 'open door' horizontally, as an opportunity for ministry, for example in 1 Corinthians 16, 2 Corinthians 2, and Colossians 4. However, I believe in the context of this passage, Jesus is referring to a vertical open door. In the following verse, Jews claimed they had the open door to the kingdom of God but they were actually stopping people from coming to know Jesus. He is saying that He has established an open door that gives us full access to the kingdom and to the presence of God.

## **B. Enemies bow**

*Isaiah 45:14*

*Thus says the LORD:*

*“The wealth of Egypt and the merchandise of Cush,*

*and the Sabceans, men of stature,*

*shall come over to you and be yours;*

*they shall follow you;*

*they shall come over in chains and bow down to you.*

*They will plead with you, saying:*

*‘Surely God is in you, and there is no other,*

*no god besides him.’”*

This does not refer to every nation bowing down in the final judgment, but to specific enemies who will see that Jesus loves the church of Philadelphia. It is an allusion to the Old Testament where God uses Israelites to bring Gentiles to Him. In Revelation, the opposite is happening: the many Gentiles of the Philadelphian church will bring the harsh Jews to the Lord. The promises made to the Israelites in the Old Testament are being fulfilled in the Philadelphian church, showing that the New Testament church is the new and true Israel, worshipping the true God.

This verse does not refer to vindication or revenge over our enemies, but rather to our effectiveness in ministry. As New Testament Israelites, truly faithful to the Lord, persevere in ministry through opposition, persecution, and rejection, all will bow down to worship the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. Ultimately, Jesus will win, and if we are on His side, He will use us, so that our work in the Lord will not be in vain.

## **C. Kept from the hour of trial**

The hour of trial does not refer to a first century event of great suffering, but most likely to the seven year period of Tribulation during the end times. Some believe that the Rapture of believers will occur before the Tribulation, while others believe that it will occur in the middle, or after the Tribulation. I do not believe this verse talks about deliverance from the coming Tribulation, but that believers must go through the seven years period of suffering if they live during that time for two reasons:

1. Contextual reason from the verse

As the Philadelphian church has kept God's name through their trials, God promises to keep them through further trials.

## 2. Grammatical reason from the verse

In Greek, the phrase "keep" could mean both "keep from" or "keep through". However, the former is only used once in the New Testament, in John 17:15.

*John 17:15*

*I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one.*

Jesus does not ask God for us to be removed from suffering, but that we would be kept away from falling into temptations. This is not a verse about physical protection but one about spiritual protection, so that we would be able to be faithful in the midst of tribulation because of the faithfulness of God.

Nowhere in Revelation are believers promised immunity from physical suffering. Even if you live before the Tribulation, all kinds of hardship and difficulties will come, but whatever the hour of trial and terrors, no one can snatch us from Jesus, and nothing can separate us from God's love in Jesus Christ.

C.S. Lewis, when asked why the righteous suffer, answered, "Why not?" Because of God's grace, they are the only ones who can take suffering. Not only can we take it, we can live through it, grow in it, and shine so that others can see Jesus Christ through us, showing who Jesus is and what He has done on the cross. In hardship and difficulty, continue to show Christ, love others, serve, and give, being generous in poverty. To do that, hold on to the Word, and the Word will hold on to us.

## IV. Jesus commands

Through all the grace, strength, empowerment that Jesus gives to us, Jesus commands. In just one verse, He tells us three things.

### A. "I am coming soon"

The phrase "I am coming soon" can mean three things. It can refer to the final coming, when all of us will be in Christ. Or it can refer to temporal judgment, Jesus bringing consequences for our sin out of love so that we can repent. Three times in these letters it is this threat. The fourth time here, it is for encouragement. Jesus is coming to bring temporary deliverance with strength and empowerment. The phrase brings both comfort and warning, because we must continue in faithfulness.

### B. "Hold fast what you have"

The Philadelphian church had the Word of God. If we hold on to something that shakes, we will also be shaken, but if we hold fast to the Word of God, we will never be shaken.

### **C. “So that no one may seize your crown”**

*Revelation 2:10*

*Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and for ten days you will have tribulation. Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life.*

*2 Timothy 4:8*

*Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing.*

When Jesus comes in judgment, there will be judgment for nonbelievers as well as rewards for believers. We will receive rewards according to the degree of faithfulness we display in our lives. Revelation 2:10 says we have the crown of life, the reward of our spiritual life. This crown is not a royal diadem, but the Greek word *stephanos*, the garland or wreath awarded to winners of athletic contests. If you fight to live for Christ in this world, your Spirit’s nature will grow, and you will receive the reward as a victor in your spiritual life.

2 Timothy 4:8 talks about the crown of righteousness. Our reward is more of Christ as He pours Himself out to us. Thus, in this life, we must fight to grow in our Spirit’s nature. It is worth it because the more we fight, the more we can have eternal joy in the righteousness of Christ.

People can hinder us in our fight and in our journey, and we need to ask if we surround ourselves with these people. Are there people who lead us away from the narrow path? You might even be the one hindering others. I hope we are all people who help others, so that the more people spend time with us, the more they love Jesus. We need to protect our hearts and keep our eyes on the prize. Stay with people who will help us walk on the narrow path and receive the crown. Neither let other people take our crowns nor cause others to lose theirs.

## **V. Jesus promises**

### **A. Pillar**

A pillar is an integral part of the temple that can never leave. Remember that Philadelphia was unstable because of the earthquakes. But Jesus tells us not to worry because we will be part of a pillar that will never be shaken in its eternal spiritual stability. We have spiritual security in Jesus Christ. Galatians 2:9 tells us apostles are the pillars of the church, meaning there are positions of authority in heaven for those who are faithful in the Lord. We will never be shaken or apart from God.

### **B. The name of my God**

In those times, names were engraved on pillars to honor people. On the pillar in the temple, three names will be engraved over us. In eternity, God will engrave His name on us, saying that we belong to Him. He says, “You are mine forever. No one can snatch you away from me; nothing can separate you from me. You are mine.”

### **C. The name of the city of my God**

*Ezekiel 48:35*

*The circumference of the city shall be 18,000 cubits. And the name of the city from that time on shall be, The LORD Is There.”*

The city of Philadelphia was briefly renamed the city of Caesar, but God says we will have new citizenship in the city of God. Jesus says that we are not only His children, but His people. Ezekiel 48:35 tells us that God is present in our midst. We will be part of His kingdom, and He will engrave His name on us.

### **D. My own new name**

*Isaiah 62:2*

*The nations shall see your righteousness,  
and all the kings your glory,  
And you shall be called by a new name  
That the mouth of the LORD will give.*

*Revelation 19:12*

*His eyes are like a flame of fire, and on his head are many diadems, and he has a name written that no one knows but himself.*

Isaiah 62:2 tells us that God always gives us progressive revelation, slowly revealing more of Himself. When Jesus Christ came, God became visible, and He gave the name Emmanuel, ‘God With Us’. In heaven, there is a new name, so in eternity God will give more and more of Himself to us. Jesus is infinite so we will always have greater intimacy with Him as we become like Him.

The diadems in Revelation 19:12 are the crowns of the king, and our victor’s crowns are a likeness of His crowns. He has a name written that no one knows, meaning that every day He shows more of Himself, and we receive more joy as we grow in our likeness of Christ. There will be infinite rewards and joy as we grow deeper in intimacy with Christ in eternity. He gives more of His love, fellowship, and attributes to us.

## **Conclusion**

*Genesis 50:20*

*As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today.*

In the movie *Toy Story*, the main character Woody feels out of place until the owner, Andy, writes his name on the bottom of Woody's foot. At that moment, Woody knows he belongs to Andy and is at home. This is the same thing Jesus does to us when He engraves His name unto us. Listen to God as He says, "You are mine." No matter what the world says or how much you are shaken, know who you are. The question of who we are is important, but as Christians, it is even more important to know who we belong to, or whose we are. God will open the door and pour His grace upon us, so we can endure and be faithful.

When we go through hardship and difficulty, rather than having a victim mentality and blaming the situation or other people, we need to know that we are of Christ. He will strengthen us to overcome anything and everything. We should not let anyone seize our crowns. Continue to persevere and live out your identity in Jesus Christ.

Joseph, in Genesis, came out of a broken family, was betrayed and sold into slavery by his siblings, and was imprisoned through false accusations and lies. All his brothers came from a different mother, and they hated him because his father displayed favoritism toward him. But his brothers' betrayal led to Joseph being sold to Egypt, meeting Potiphar, meeting Potiphar's wife, being falsely accused, being put into prison, meeting the butler and the baker in prison, meeting Pharaoh, interpreting Pharaoh's dreams, becoming the prime minister of Egypt, and finally being used by God to save the world from a famine. Joseph pointed to the King of Kings, Jesus, who would save the world. The lesson is not that you will be great, like Joseph, but that God is already great. Suffering may not turn out to give you success, but it will prepare you for servanthood. Your story may stop at the broken home, or at the pit, or the master's house, or the prison. It may never reach the palace. But God is always using the lessons from your past for the wisdom of your future. The character you develop will be used for your calling in the future. Continue to be faithful and seize your crown.