

Sermon Mark S. Aites  
SERIES: 7 CHURCHES OF ASIA  
**SERMON #6: THE CHURCH IN PHILADELPHIA**

**TEXT: REVELATION 3:7-13**

**INTRODUCTION:**

1. In our previous lessons:
  - 1) We noted the great church in Ephesus; strong in defending the faith, who left their first love.
  - 2) We learned then of Smyrna, and the coming intensified persecution; and the charge to remain faithful unto death (**Rev. 2:10**).
  - 3) We examined the church in Pergamos; their weakness in that some were holding to false doctrines and the admonition to hold to the truth, that they might overcome.
  - 4) As we looked at the church in Thyatira; an apparent growing congregation, we learned of Jezebel who needed to be dealt with and the admonition to overcome.
  - 5) In our last lesson we studied the church in Sardis.
    1. The congregation which the Lord said who thought they were alive, but were dead.
    2. We learned the truth that some churches are dead.
    3. Sardis did have a righteous remnant that needed to remain watchful that the remnant not follow suit with that which had died.
2. Philadelphia was located 28 miles south east of Sardis on the Cogamus River.
  - 1) The city was named after its founder King Attalus Philedelphos II of Pergamum.
  - 2) City of brotherly love was built out of affection for his brother and predecessor Ecumenes II.
  - 3) Philadelphia was a city known for the spread of the Greek language and culture.
  - 4) The city was regarded as a wealthy trade center; it was located on the main route between the east and the west.
3. Philadelphia was also known widely for its rich farming: for the abundance of vines and grapes.
4. Closely associated with that, the city worshipped Dionysus, the Greek god of the vine (wine).
5. It was a city which had many temples and festivals related to their idolatry; earned the nickname of "little Athens."
6. The city however was not without problems: like Sardis, it was 1 of 11 cities destroyed in the earthquake of 17 A.D.
  - 1) As with Sardis, Tiberius the city rebuilt.
  - 2) In gratitude the city was called "neocaesarea" ("New Caesar").
  - 3) Under Vespatian's reign, they called it Flavia, but these names didn't seem to catch on.
  - 4) Historians speak of the people living in fear in this city from the tremors, some living in huts outside the city.
7. The description of the one addressing the church:

**Rev. 3:7** *"These things says He who is holy, He who is true, "He who has the key of David, He who opens and no one shuts, and shuts and no one opens."*

  - 1) The one addressing is holy:

**Isa. 6:3** *"Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; The whole earth is full of His glory!"*

**Heb. 7:26** *"For such a High Priest was fitting for us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and has become higher than the heavens."*

- 2) He also is identified as *"He who is true."* (**John 14:6**).
  1. True light (**John 1:9**).
  2. True bread (**John 6:32**).
  3. True vine (**John 15:1**).
  4. True God (**1 John 5:20**).
  5. The faithful and true witness (**Rev. 3:14**).
- 3) The one addressing has the keys of David.
  1. **Isa. 22:22** *"The key of the house of David I will lay on his shoulder; So he shall open, and no one shall shut; And he shall shut, and no one shall open."*
  2. Keys were regarded as symbols of authority; the authority to permit entrance.
  3. Jesus claimed all authority (**Matt. 28:18**).
  4. Possessing the keys, the Lord can provide entrance, and He can keep those who are unworthy from entering.
  5. Jesus is the Messiah; and possessing the keys of David even now reigns from the throne of David at the right hand of God (**Heb. 1:3**).

## DISCUSSION:

### I. THE PRAISE (3:8).

- A. **3:8** *"I know your works. See, I have set before you an open door, and no one can shut it; for you have a little strength, have kept My word, and have not denied My name."*
- B. *"I know your works."*
  1. These works were unlike those of Sardis; that which characterized them as a dead church (**3:1**).
  2. These were works recognized by the Lord.  
**Acts 10:35** *"But in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him."*
  3. The outgrowth of works is open doors.
- C. *"I have set before you an open door."*
  1. The use appears to be a figurative expression.
  2. The same phrase is used elsewhere in Scripture:
    - 1) For example: a door of faith had been opened to the Gentiles (**Acts 14:27**).
    - 2) A great and effectual door was opened at Ephesus (**1 Cor. 16:9**).
    - 3) A door was opened for the gospel at Troas (**2 Cor. 2:12**).
    - 4) Paul even sought prayers for an open door to speak of Christ (**Col. 4:3**).
  3. The door was opened for evangelism at Philadelphia; as well as an open door for the expansion of the Greek language and culture.
  4. The reasons for this opportunity is evident in His praise for them.
- D. *"For you have a little strength."*
  1. This may signify a couple of things:
    - 1) They may have been a small struggling congregation.
    - 2) They may have been small or little in physical, material, and worldly strength.
  2. Despite this, they were not like Sardis for they were alive!
  3. If indeed it refers to their size, with the door opened, that would change if they took advantage of the opened door.
- E. *"Have kept My word."*
  1. The congregation stood fast and remained true to Christ's teachings and

commands.

2. **John 14:23** *"Jesus answered and said to him, "If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him."*
- F. Philadelphia was also praised: *"and have not denied My name."*
1. They did not give into the external or internal pressures to deny the name of Christ.
  2. **Mark 13:13** *"And you will be hated by all for My name's sake. But he who endures to the end shall be saved."*
  3. We are not to deny Him, but confess Him.  
*"With the heart man believeth unto.." (Rom. 10:10).*  
*"Therefore God hath highly exalted Him and has given Him a name which is above..." (Phil. 2:9-11).*

## **II. THE PROMISES (3:9-10).**

- A. **3:9-10** *"Indeed I will make those of the synagogue of Satan, who say they are Jews and are not, but lie indeed I will make them come and worship before your feet, and to know that I have loved you.*  
**10** *"Because you have kept My command to persevere, I also will keep you from the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth."*
- B. Once again we encounter the synagogue of satan.
1. This synagogue was introduced before when we studied the church in Smyrna (**2:9**).
  2. As before: **2:9** *"I know the blasphemy of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan."*
  3. Here they are identified as liars.
  4. The true Jews were those who were circumcized inwardly.  
**Rom. 2:28-29** *"For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh;*  
**29** *but he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the Spirit, not in the letter; whose praise is not from men but from God."*
  5. A true Jew has no confidence in the flesh **Phil. 3:3**).
- C. *"I will make them come and worship before your feet, and to know that I have loved you."*
1. It was commonly believed among the Jews that those who wronged them would come bowing at their feet (**Isa. 60:14**).
  2. Here things would be reversed: proud Jews would be made to know the true Israel of God (**Gal. 6:16**).
  3. This may signify that in time some of them would know the truth: that Christ loves His children and died for them (**John 15:13**).
- D. This reminds us of those who **say** they are Jews; and those who **say** they are Christians.
1. Christianity involves more than mere words.
  2. The good confession is not just what we say, but how we live.
  3. It is far too easy to say, "I am a Christian"; but it is much harder to live the Christian life.

E. To the faithful Christians:

**3:10** *“Because you have kept My command to persevere, I also will keep you from the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth.”*

1. They are praised for the endurance and steadfastness.
2. Reminds us of Paul’s statement in **1 Cor. 15:58** *“Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmoveable, alway abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord.”*
3. They had faithfully kept the commands of Christ; as a result, Jesus makes a promise.
4. *“I also will keep you from the hour of trial...”*
  - 1) The trial or temptation that would try the the world is not revealed to us.
  - 2) It could entail persecution, famine, disease, pestilence, etc., likely persecution in light of the statement in **3:11**.
  - 3) It is clear that Jesus intended to help the church during this crisis.
  - 4) But the means that the Lord will use is often misunderstood; the key to this comes in point III.

### **III.THE PERSEVERANCE (3:11-12).**

A. **3:11** *“Behold, I am coming quickly! Hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown.”*

B. The encouragement is to hold fast, an encouragement in light of the pressure to come.

C. How would the Lord help them? (McGuiggan)

1. McGuiggan observed: It is like the prayer, “Deliver us from temptation.”
2. Not “keep us from being tempted, but “keep us from losing under temptation.”
3. “Jesus keeping them from the hour is keeping them from what the hour could produce; i.e. apostasy.” (Ibid.)
4. The Lord would be their anchor through this storm. They needed to host fast to the Lord and His teaching that they might endure and persevere.

D. They were not to let anyone take their crowns.

1. **1 Cor. 10:12.**
2. To forfeit one’s crown is to forfeit eternal life.
3. Even today, we can lose it out of complacency or perhaps even from bad influence (**1 Cor. 15:33**).
4. For the church in Philadelphia, the pressure of persecution can cause them to renounce the Christ and forfeit their crown.

E. For the one who perseveres and endures:

**3:12** *“He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he shall go out no more. 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 I will write on him My new name.”*

1. The promise of being a pillar signifies stability, to be solid and immovable.
2. Those who had seen the pillars of idolatrous temples shake and tremble, and crack and crumble in the earthquakes, knew only to run when such things occurred.

3. Those who live in California probably can relate to that; the danger of things falling on you in a fault line are great.
  4. I have had relatives for years living where their houses will shake; but they are not inclined to move.
- F. But God's temple is different.
1. It has a solid foundation built upon Jesus Christ (**1 Cor. 3:11**); Christ of course being its chief cornerstone (**1 Pet. 2:6**).
  2. God's Holy temple is constructed of living stones (**1 Pet. 2:5**).
  3. Christians as individuals are also temples, in which the Spirit of God resides (**1 Cor. 6:19**).
  4. In knowing Christ, through the Word of God, one can be a pillar in His temple, the church.
- G. *"And he shall go out no more."* This signifies to us that the pillar in mind is one of permanence rather than support.
- H. Then follows the Lord speaking of the writing of names.
1. *"And I will write on him the name of My God."*
    - 1) In the O.T., God's name was written upon His temple (**2 Chron. 7:16**).
    - 2) The name written upon the temple designates ownership.
    - 3) **Gal. 6:17** *"From now on let no one trouble me, for I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus."*
    - 4) **1 Cor. 6:20** *"For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are Gods."*
    - 5) The church wears the name of her husband, Christ (**Rom. 16:16**).
    - 6) And as disciples we wear the name Christian to show that we are His (**Acts 11:26**).
  2. *"And I will write on him the name of My God and the name of the city of My God."*
    - 1) The Lord mentions it as the New Jerusalem.
    - 2) **21:2** *"Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband."*
    - 3) John figuratively saw it as the glorified new Jerusalem, as the bride receiving the reward mentioned beginning in **Rev. 21:4**.
    - 4) Those who are a part of this heavenly city have their citizenship written in heaven (**Phil. 3:20**).
    - 5) And they have with joy the prospect of an eternal home with God.
  3. *"And I will write on him My new name."*
    - 1) It is said of the Christ: **1:4** *"Having become so much better than the angels, as He has by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they."*
    - 2) **Rev. 19:12** *"...He had a name written that no one knew except Himself."*
    - 3) His new name in fact identifies Him as victor; and speaks of His glory.
    - 4) **19:13** *"He was clothed with a robe dipped in blood, and His name is called The Word of God."*
    - 5) **19:16** *"And He has on His robe and on His thigh a name written: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS."*
    - 6) For Christians, what could that new name signify?  
**Col. 3:4** *"When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory."*

**1 John 3:2** *“Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.”*

- 7) What the new name apparently will signify is the shared glory and victory with and in Jesus Christ our Lord.

#### **IV. APPLICATION.**

- A. Philadelphia was a blessed congregation.
1. We note that unlike the other congregations, the Lord does not speak of problems which they needed to correct.
  2. Despite this however there are points which we need to consider.
- B. Consider that the Lord had opened a door of opportunity for this congregation.
1. There are times collectively and individually that there are doors of opportunity opened for us.
  2. Our failure in this is that some times we don't take advantage of the opportunities that present themselves to us.
  3. For example: someone shows interest in the church; or someone asks a Bible question; or when we have an opportunity to study with someone, or invite them to services, etc.
  4. Open doors can be regarded as blessings from God, and should not be taken lightly. Too many souls are at stake for us to ignore them.
- C. We admire also their ability to endure and persevere.
1. At times we want to give up; we get tired or depressed.
  2. Sometimes there are those who even look for ways to compromise the word to be more pleasing to their friends and neighbors.
  3. Philadelphia was striving to remain true to the teachings and commands of Christ.
  4. **1 Cor. 16:13 NKJV** *“Watch, stand fast in the faith, be brave, be strong.”*
  5. Paul told Timothy: **2 Tim. 4:5** *“But you be watchful in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.”*
- D. Too, they were commended for not denying the name of Christ.
1. We are ridiculed by family, friends, neighbors; how easy it would be to just cave in to the pressure.
  2. **Matt. 10:22** *“And ye shall be hated of all men for my names sake: but he that endureth to the end shall be saved.”*
- E. We must strive not to let others take our crowns
1. **2 Tim. 4:8** *“Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing.”*
  2. That crown is far too valuable to allow someone to deprive us of it.
  3. But the New Testament writers plainly warn us that there will be those who will try to deprive us of it.
- F. As the song says: *“In the hour of trial, Jesus plead for me, Lest by base denial, I depart from Thee; When Thou seest me waver, with a look recall, nor for fear nor favor, suffer me to fall.”* **vs 3:** *“Should thy mercy send me Sorrow, toil and woe, or should pain attend me, on my path below, Grant that I may never Fail Thy hand to see; Grant that I may ever cast my care on Thee.”*

- G. How was it that the early Christians endured in times of persecution and distress.
1. The answer is that they placed all of their faith and trust in Jesus.
  2. He was the sure foundation of their lives; He was the friend who was with them regardless of what they faced (**Heb. 13:5**).
  3. *“There’s not a friend like the lowly Jesus...None else could heal all our soul’s diseases; no, not one; no, not one. Jesus knows all about our struggles; He will guide till the day is done; There’s not a friend like the lowly Jesus, no, not one, no, not one.”*

**CONCLUSION:**

1. Those who remain steadfast and persevere to the end will be blessed with that precious name yet to be uttered.
2. A name associated with victory, which we have in Jesus.
3. If you want to be among those who endure to the end and overcome this world, then give your heart and life in service to the Master.
4. Plan of salvation.
5. Christian: If you are struggling, come to Jesus.