

Hear What The Spirit Says Philadelphia

We will be wrapping up this series of messages to the seven churches of Revelation next Sunday. I hope this has been helpful and informative. I remind you again of the words of John at the beginning of the book of Revelation. **“Blessed is the one who reads the words of this prophecy and blessed are those who hear it and take to heart what is written in it, because the time is near.” Revelation 1:3** I trust we’ve heard what the Spirit has been saying to us through these letters and taken to heart these messages. I believe the Lord has been speaking to us and he isn’t finished yet. He has more to say, so let’s open our hearts and our spiritual ears and hear what the Spirit says to the church today. We are looking at the church at Philadelphia.

Show Map Philadelphia was about twenty-eight miles south east of Sardis, where we were last Sunday. It stood in a region that had at times been devastated by earthquakes. The earth quake that devastated Sardis in AD 17 had also demolished Philadelphia. With the help of the Emperor it had been rebuilt and renamed, New Caesarea and then years later it was renamed Flavia and eventually reverted back to the original name of Philadelphia. The city was founded in the second century BC with the idea it would be on the front lines of spreading Greek language and culture eastward into Asia. It was built with a missionary purpose to spread Greek culture and now the church in Philadelphia had an open door and opportunity to spread the gospel!

“To the angel of the church in Philadelphia write: These are the words of him who is holy and true, who holds the key of David. What he opens no one can shut and what he shuts no one can open. I know your deeds. See, I have placed before you an open door that no one can shut. I know that you have little strength, yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name. I will make those who are of the synagogue of Satan, who claim to be Jews though they are not, but are liars – I will make them come and fall down at your feet and acknowledge that I have loved you. Since you have kept my command to endure patiently, I will also keep you from the hour of trial that is going to come upon the whole world to test those who live on the earth.” Revelation 3:7-10

For the first time the letter doesn’t point back to the description of Jesus in chapter 1. Instead, Jesus refers to himself as the one who is holy and true and who holds the key of David. Certainly it is no less significant, but what does this mean? He is holy and true. “The Holy One” is a title God gave to himself in the Old Testament. Through the prophet Isaiah God asked, **“To**

whom will you compare me? Or who is my equal? says the Holy One.” Isaiah 40:25 Here Jesus is identifying Himself as the Holy One, One with the Father, fully God and fully man.

Not only is he the Holy One, but he is also true. He is true not just in the sense of being reliable, that he does not lie, but Jesus declares in John 14 that he is, in fact, “The Way and The Truth and The Life.” John declares in his gospel that Jesus was the Word of God made flesh, he made his dwelling among us and we have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, the Holy One, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. He is Holy and He is Truth. Divine in every sense.

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Jesus then adds that he is the one who holds the key of David and that he opens and shuts the door. In chapter 1 he said he held the key to death and Hades, but what is the key of David? This is a reference to a rather obscure passage in Isaiah 22. The Lord speaks to a steward in charge of the palace of Hezekiah, a guy named Shebna, and tells him that he, the Lord, is giving Shebna’s job to a man named Eliakim. The Lord says, **“I will place on his shoulder the key to the house of David; what he opens no one can shut and what he shuts no one can open.”**
Isaiah 22:22

The Lord is telling the church that he has been given authority. The one with the key has authority, right? “I have the keys, I have the authority and the doors I open, no one can shut.” There is something very re-assuring about that. He has all authority, he has the keys and we belong to him. It’s good news for a church that Jesus says has little strength. They weren’t very significant in a lot of ways, but they served the One who has all power and authority and he was placing before them an open door, an opportunity, and remember He is the one who said not even the gates of Hell could prevail against Him and his church!

Look at our passage again. **“These are the words of him who is holy and true, who holds the key of David. What he opens no one can shut and what he shuts no one can open. I know your deeds. See, I have placed before you an open door that no one can shut. I know that you have little strength, yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name. I will make those who are of the synagogue of Satan, who claim to be Jews though they are not, but are liars – I will make them come and fall down at your feet and acknowledge that I have loved you. Since you have kept my command to endure patiently, I will also keep you from the hour of trial that is going to come upon the whole world to test those who live on the earth.” Revelation 3:7-10**

He tells them he knows their deeds. Once again, he is watching, he is aware, he is recording and rewarding our deeds, our efforts for him and his kingdom. He hasn't overlooked you and the good deeds you are doing. He has seen what they were doing, the good deeds, and because they were faithful, he has opened new doors, new opportunity for them.

To this church there is no rebuke, no correction, only commendation. I know that you have little strength, yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name. Apparently they weren't many in number, they may have been from a lower class of society, slaves, working class folks, not many people of influence or position or wealth, but they had kept his word, they had remained obedient and faithful, they had not denied his name, regardless of the pressures and persecution they lived under.

We are reminded again of what God measures and values. Not numbers or budgets and buildings, not degrees or achievements or recognition by the world, but God measures and values faithfulness, loyalty to Him and his kingdom. The little church at Philadelphia didn't have much strength, but God delights in taking the weak and doing extraordinary things with them. He doesn't need numbers to provide victory. Like Gideon's army in the Old Testament, he didn't need thirty thousand, they'll take the glory. Give me 300 that are faithful and loyal and that will give God all the glory! You feel like you aren't strong enough or talented enough, but the bible says God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise and the weak things of the world to shame the strong so no one could boast before him. The church at Philadelphia was determined to be faithful, determined to keep God's word and refused to deny Him or his name and Jesus says, “Perfect, that's who I've been looking for. I can use that bunch at Philadelphia. Or at Carbondale!” That's what Jesus honors in his letter to them: Faithfulness and obedience.

Once again the Jewish community and synagogue leaders were presenting a problem to the church. Indications are that Philadelphia had a large Jewish community so perhaps there were 2-3,000 Jews and a small group of Christians. No doubt part of the Christians were Jewish and had at one time been part of the Jewish synagogue. After their decision to follow Jesus as Messiah they were put out of the synagogue and told they were apostate and no longer had access to God. If they weren't obeying the laws of Judaism and were following Jesus instead, then God had rejected them. But Jesus takes another phrase from the prophet Isaiah and turns it around on those of the Jewish community who had rejected him. From Isaiah 60. The promise was to the Jewish people who were being mistreated by Gentiles. Now the Lord uses this promise to assure the Philadelphian church that they were in fact following the Holy One, the one who was the truth and who held the keys. **“The sons of your oppressors will come bowing before you; all who despise you will bow down at your feet and will call you the City of the Lord, Zion of the Holy One of Israel.” Isaiah 60:14.** He says I will make them know that I have loved you. The day will come when Jesus will open the eyes of the Jews to see He was and is the Holy One and that he loved us and that the Father has accepted us rather than rejected us.

Jesus has some harsh words for the Jewish community that had slandered the church at Philadelphia. N.T.Wright, in his commentary on Revelation states, “We remind ourselves again that it is not ‘anti-Jewish’; what we have here is what we might call an inner-Jewish question. Which of these groups can properly claim to be the true Jews, bearing the the torch of God’s ancient people? This, as we saw, was a common enough question in other parts of first-century Judaism. Here Jesus is quite clear. Those who follow him, the Davidic Messiah, are the true Jews. Those who deny him are forfeiting their right to that noble name....Eventually it will be clear that the followers of Jesus are the ones who can go through the open door...[the door that Jesus has opened through his sacrificial death and resurrection].

Jesus says, **“Since you have kept my command to endure patiently, I will also keep you from the hour of trial that is going to come upon the whole world to test those who live on the earth.” Revelation 3:10** They had kept his word through the persecution that came from the Jewish community and others and now Jesus promises to keep them! They had kept his command to endure patiently – to persevere – to remain faithful and obedient regardless of what they encountered, regardless of persecution, rejection, deprivation. Now he promises to be faithful to them. He will keep them in the hour of trial and tribulation that was coming.

Some scholars believe he is referring to the tribulation period that is described later in the book of Revelation. Others believe he was referring to a time of greater persecution against the church from the Roman emperor. Regardless of what the time frame was, or is, what we need to hear is the promise of Jesus that he will keep them. He would be loyal, faithful, present, near to them when they were going through a trial. He loved them and he would be with them!

I can't predict what is coming on America or on this world but I can assure you that if you belong to Jesus, if you have committed your life to him and you are part of his church, he will keep you and carry you through! There is an hour of trial and a season of testing – it comes into every life at some point, and there will come an ultimate time of testing and trial upon the inhabitants of this nation and this earth. We have to decide if we are going to remain faithful, if we are going to keep his word and refuse to deny him and his name, his values, his nature. We have to decide if we are going to remain true to Jesus.

He tells his church, **“I am coming soon. Hold on to what you have so that no one will take your crown.” Revelation 3:11** He is coming soon. Is he talking about the rapture, the catching away of the church? He has warned the previous churches of his coming to discipline, to purge, to cleanse. I believe the same can be said for the church in America today. We have strayed from his word and denied his name. He is coming to discipline, to correct error and bring us back in line. He has also promised to come to deliver us if we remain faithful. So there are a couple of ways to interpret his warning that he is coming, but understand this is the central message of the book of Revelation – He is coming! It's the final word he speaks in the last chapter of Revelation. “Yes, I am coming soon!” He is coming and it is that message, that knowledge, regardless of how we interpret it that should motivate and drive the church. He is coming so we need to stay on mission. He is coming so we need to repent and do the works he has called us to. He is coming so we need to tell others to get prepared, to accept Jesus as Savior and Lord. He is coming so we need to reject false doctrine and embrace and proclaim the truth. He is coming so we need to wake up and strengthen what remains. He is coming so we must hold on to what we have so no one can take our crown. He commands us to hold on – the verb tense is present and active – hold on and keep on holding on. Hold on so no one takes your crown. It is the victor's crown presented to those who win the race. Don't let anyone distract or disqualify you from finishing the race. Don't lose sight of the finish line because he is coming soon! Don't quit because there is a crown! Do you believe that? Do you understand that his

reward is worth the effort, the sacrifice? Don't let anyone convince you that Jesus doesn't love you, that you might as well throw in the towel, that you aren't strong enough to live for Jesus, that you are missing out on really living if you live for Jesus and serve him. Hold fast. Don't let anyone pull you away from Jesus and his grace. Hold on!

Jesus concludes the letter, **“Him who overcomes I will make a pillar in the temple of my God. Never again will he leave it. I will write on him the name of my God and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which is coming down out of heaven from my God; and I will also write on him my new name. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.” Revelation 3:12-13**

For those who keep holding on, who overcome, who trust in Jesus and refuse to quit, he will make you a pillar in the temple of God. Remember, some of these saints had been put out of the synagogue but he tells them they will never be put out again. He promises them permanent status, permanent residence in the temple of God.

Remember too the earthquakes that had plagued this city. But Jesus tells them he will make them permanent pillars. In the archaeological ruins of the ancient city of Philadelphia there are apparently pillars from a temple and from a basilica that were long ago destroyed. The buildings are gone but the pillars remain. To those who overcome, we will never have to worry about losing our place with him. He is going to write on us the name of God and the name of the city of God, the new Jerusalem. “If found, please return to...” He is telling us and announcing to all of creation that we belong to the Father! This is where we belong and this is to whom we belong. No more question or doubt. And Jesus says I will also write on him my new name. He is going to put his name on us. Bryan Davenport said Jesus' promise to us is permanent and personal! His name is going to be on us.

If you've spent a lifetime feeling like you don't fit, you don't belong. You've been abandoned, passed around from relative to relative, from family to family, you've never had a permanent home, a permanent address, come to Jesus. When you meet him, you have a family and you have a home. He makes it permanent. To him who overcomes, who remains faithful to Jesus, it's a permanent residence. You'll never be asked to leave. He is going to put his name on you. Talk about belonging somewhere and to someone. That's what Jesus does! Adopted into the family, a permanent home and a permanent name! His name. I belong!

He who has an ear to hear. Hear what he is saying to us today. We belong to him. He is going to keep us. Trouble is coming, but did you hear what I said? We belong to him and he is going to keep us! Every generation, every person and place has faced trials and trouble. As we understand the prophecy of Revelation there will come an even greater time of tribulation and trouble upon this earth prior to his coming, but regardless what we need to remember is that he will keep us! We belong to him! Hold on to his word, hold on to him, remain faithful and obedient because he will keep us. He will keep us in eternity. He will keep us in the time of testing that will come on the earth. He will keep us today and tomorrow, in whatever we may be facing. He will keep you, in times of trouble, in times of sickness and sorrow, he will keep you in times of setback, loss, heartache, he will keep you in times of disappointment and when you are disillusioned by life and by friends or family, he will keep you when people are mean, when life seems unfair. He will keep you. Sometimes he keeps us from and sometimes he keeps us in, but he will keep us!

So we have one job. **“I am coming soon. Hold on to what you have so that no one will take your crown.” Revelation 3:11** Hold on to what you have. Don't let down your guard. Hold fast to your faith. Hold fast to Jesus. Guard your heart and guard the call of God on your life. Don't let anything or anyone get between you and Jesus! Don't let an offense, a disappointment, a person, a church, a past slight or comment, a betrayal, don't let anything cause you to let go of Jesus. Hold on. Paul says nothing can separate us from Jesus and from his love, not death nor life nor angels nor demons or principalities or powers, not things present nor things to come, not height nor depth, things created, nothing can and nothing should separate us from Him and his love. He has promised to keep you. He has promised to keep holding on to you so you keep holding to him! Hear what the Spirit is saying to you and to the church today!