

# Pr Mark Turner: Philadelphia (24/8/19)

**Scripture Reading:** Revelation 3:7-13

## Introduction:

The church in Philadelphia is the faithful church among the seven. In the message of Jesus to the church in Philadelphia, we will see what is the reward of faithfulness.

In **Psalms 73:2-13** we read of David wrestling with the question of the value of being faithful. In the face of the seemingly great prosperity of the wicked, and the comparative suffering of the faithful, he is found crying out to God, asking something like 'what is the point?'

And then, as though the penny dropped, he declares "When I thought how to understand this, it was too painful for me— Until I went into the sanctuary of God; then I understood their end" in **Psalms 73:16,17**. It was only in the context of eternity that he was able to make sense of the suffering that often attends faithfulness.

In **Hebrews 11:6** it says that it is IMPOSSIBLE to please God, without faith. Suffering may come, yet we are to remain faithful through it, because of faith - not sight. An attitude of faithfulness, 'no matter the cost,' is pleasing to God. The verse before (Hebrews 11:5) tells how Enoch was an example of what will become of those who are unwavering in their faithfulness.

**Revelation 3:7** - "And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write..."

Among the seven churches, Philadelphia is one of two churches to whom there is no words of condemnation.

## The City:

Philadelphia lay 25 miles southeast of Sardis and was the 'youngest' of the seven cities.

It was founded sometime after 189 BC by the Pergamenian king Attalus II, whose admiration for his brother Eumenes II had earned him the nickname Philadelphus ("brother lover"). And so, it was after Philadelphus, that the city of Philadelphia ("brotherly love") was named.

It was situated on a high volcanic plateau, making it a strong, fortress city. However, in spite of its fortress-like qualities, Philadelphia wasn't founded primarily as a military outpost, but as a 'missionary city' to promote Greek culture and language in the area of Lydia and Phrygia.

Apparently they were quite successful in this mission, as most of the Lydian language had been completely replaced by Greek by about the year AD 19.

Philadelphia's geographical location made it subject to occasional earthquakes, and the severe earthquake of AD 17 devastated the city together with Sardis and ten other surrounding cities.

## The Church:

Like most of the other seven churches, it was probably founded during Paul's ministry at Ephesus (Acts 19:10), but little is known about the Philadelphia church apart from this passage in Revelation.

A few years after John wrote Revelation, the church father Ignatius passed through Philadelphia on his way to martyrdom at Rome. Some of the Christians from Philadelphia were martyred along with Polycarp at Smyrna.

This church lasted for centuries. This was because the Christians in Philadelphia stood firm even after the region was overrun by the Muslims, until finally disappearing sometime during the fourteenth century.

### **The Correspondent:**

**Revelation 3:7** - "And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write, '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.'"

Unlike the previous five letters, where Jesus' self-description comes from the vision recorded in 1:12-17, this description of Him is unique and is not drawn from that earlier vision. It has distinctly Old Testament features.

- **Holiness** - This was a very strong emphasis in the Old Testament. Along with many other passages, places like Isaiah 6:3 (when Isaiah saw the glory of the Lord) and Isaiah 57:15, the holiness of God was presented as evidence of His divinity. By using these words to describe Himself to the church in Philadelphia, Jesus is making an un mistakeable claim to deity.
- **True** - The Greek word that is used here describes genuineness and authenticity. This too, was a prominent feature in the storyline of the Old Testament where idolatry was rampant. God was constantly calling Himself the 'true' God, in contrast to the fakes that were being created by the hands of men. Jesus, by attaching this language to Himself, is claiming to be the true God - faithful to all the promises He has given to His people.
- **Key of David** - A key is representative of authority. Whoever holds the keys to something has ultimate control (Revelation 1:18, Matthew 28:18). The term 'key of David' comes directly from the book of Isaiah. In Isaiah 22:15-22, we read about the keys of David's palace being taken from Shebna (who had been unfaithful) and given to Eliakim. This key gave Eliakim authority over all of the royal palace and the royal storehouse! By invoking this imagery, Jesus is saying that 'all of the authority and riches of heaven are at His disposal!'

### **The Commendation:**

**Revelation 3:8-10** - "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. 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. 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."

"You have a little strength" - Far from being a jab at them, this was an affirmation. In spite of their size, Jesus says, they are a faithful church.

"You have kept My word & not denied My name" - In the midst of widespread compromise, apostasy and sleep (as we have seen in the previous churches), Jesus affirms this church for their faithfulness to His message, and His name.

Because of their faithfulness, Christ made several promises to them:

- **"An open door"** - Firstly, this promise meant that the door to God's kingdom was open to them! If they were to remain faithful, as they were, their salvation was assured. Secondly, it symbolised that Christ was giving the faithful Philadelphian church opportunities for service (1 Corinthians 16:8,9; 2 Corinthians 2:12). Because their city

was in a strategic location, it provided an 'open' opportunity to spread the gospel into Asia Minor.

- "Those who say they are Jews" - As was the case in Smyrna, Christians in Philadelphia faced hostility from the unbelieving Jews.  
Jesus' promise to them was that, unlike those were claiming to be God's chosen people - but were not, they would see the fulfilment of God's covenantal promise to Abraham - the salvation of their enemies.
- "The hour of trial" - Because the Philadelphians have been faithful, Jesus promises to keep them from 'the hour of trial' that was coming to sift the faithful from "those who dwell on the earth" (the wicked - see Revelation 6:9,10). This was not a promise to rapture them away from the trial (as some have interpreted), but rather a promise that, like Jesus communicated in John 17:15, He would preserve them during the great trial (just like he had for Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego).

### **The Command:**

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

"Hold fast what you have" - Jesus repeatedly told us in the gospels that it would be those who persevere till the end that would be saved. To the church in Philadelphia, He give the encouragement to be those persevering ones!

"your crown" - The crown, according to **Revelation 2:10**, is the crown of life. In **1 Timothy 4:8** he adds a dimension to this and says that it is the 'crown of righteousness,' whereas **1 Peter 5:4** says it is the 'crown of glory.'

The crown, for those who faithfully endure to the end, is eternal life - with all its rewards.

### **The Counsel:**

**Revelation 3:12,13** - "He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he shall go out no more. 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. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."

Be an "overcomer," Jesus says, yet again. Hold fast to what you have and stay faithful till the end!

The stability and security of eternal life with God is here contrasted with the nervousness of the people of Philadelphia after the earthquake. Such a promise of permanently dwelling in God's temple would have been appreciated by the Philadelphians, since their city suffered from earthquakes more than any other of the cities addressed.

Those who have the name of God belong to God and are under His protection. They are also citizens of the New Jerusalem. Never denying Christ's 'name' now and persevering through tribulation are the basis for inheriting the reward of everlasting identification with Christ's new 'name' at His return.

"He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says..." - There is an hour of testing and trial that is coming, Jesus says. So listen carefully for the voice of the Holy Spirit who will encourage you persevere in faithfulness to God.

### **Conclusion:**

**Revelation 7:13-17** - "Then one of the elders answered, saying to me, "Who are these arrayed in white robes, and where did they come from? And I said to him, "Sir, you know." So he said to me, "These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and washed their

robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore they are before the throne of God, and serve Him day and night in His temple. And He who sits on the throne will dwell among them. They shall neither hunger anymore nor thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike them, nor any heat; for the Lamb who is in the midst of the throne will shepherd them and lead them to living fountains of waters. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."

This is the reward for those who are faithful. God has promised this reward for those who endure steadfastly till the end. He will bring suffering to an end. He will lead us to the fountains of eternity. He will wipe away all of those things that hurt us in the here and now. He will be our eternal Guide.