

## STUDY ON THE TEACHING OF JESUS

### JESUS LETTER TO THE CHURCH IN PHILADELPHIA

Read Revelation 3:7-13

#### **Introduction**

Philadelphia means brotherly love, and this city was the youngest of the seven cities and was originally founded as a missionary outpost for Hellenism, the culture of ancient Greece. Philadelphia had been built with the deliberate intention that it might become a missionary city. Beyond Philadelphia lay the wilds of Phrygia and the barbarous tribes; and it was intended that the function of Philadelphia should be to spread the Greek language, the Greek way of life, the Greek civilization, throughout the regions beyond.

#### **Jesus describes Himself to the church at Philadelphia.**

*“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” (v7b)*

Jesus reminded the church in Philadelphia that He was holy and true. These do not describe “tendencies” within Jesus, but His very being. They also show that Jesus is Yahweh because He alone is holy in an absolute sense. There are two ancient Greek words that we might translate true. One means “true and not false.” The other means “true and not fake.” The ancient Greek word used here for true (alethinos) is the second, with the idea of “real” or “genuine.” Jesus is true in all of who He is; He is the real God and the real man.

Jesus showed He is also the keeper of the keys and doors. In this quotation from Isaiah 22:20-23, Jesus expressed His power and authority, especially to admit and exclude. The same Lord Jesus has the key of government and authority in and over the church. He opens a door of opportunity to his churches; he opens a door of utterance to his ministers; he opens a door of entrance, opens the heart. He shuts the door of heaven against the foolish, who sleep away their day of grace; and against the workers of iniquity, how vain and confident soever they may be.

#### **What Jesus knows about the church of Philadelphia.**

*“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.” (v8)*

Jesus said “I know your works” to each of the seven churches. The church at Philadelphia had served God well in difficult circumstances, and Jesus knew it. The church in Philadelphia had an open door set before them. Often, an open door speaks of evangelistic opportunity (1 Corinthians 16:9, 2 Corinthians 2:12, and Colossians 4:3). Jesus told them He had opened the door of evangelistic opportunity, and they must go through that door in faith.

In its history, Philadelphia had a great “evangelistic” calling. The city had the mission of spreading Greek culture and language through the whole region. Now Jesus opened the door for the Christians of Philadelphia to spread the culture of His kingdom through the whole region. Jesus told them to see that they had this open door. Sometimes God sets an open door of evangelistic opportunity in front of us, but we don’t see it. Once we see the open door, we then must walk through it. God wants us to take every evangelistic opportunity that He gives us.

Since Jesus is He who opens and no one shuts and no one opens (Revelation 3:7), He had the authority to keep this door open for the Christians in Philadelphia. So, they must utilise this door of opportunity.

A man once came to Charles Spurgeon and asked how he could win others to Jesus. Spurgeon asked him, “What are you? What do you do?” The man said, “I’m an engine driver on a train.” “Then,” said Spurgeon, “Is the man who shovels coal on your train a Christian?” “I don’t know,” said the man. “Go back,” said Spurgeon, “and find out and start on him.”

In most cases, our open door for evangelistic outreach is right before us – in our schools, workplaces, garages, supermarkets, and/or even, within family members and friends.

**For you have a little strength:** The term a little strength does not imply weakness, but real strength. They were weak enough to be strong in the Lord. We can be “too strong” or “too big” or too sure of ourselves for God to really use us. The church in Philadelphia had the poverty of spirit to know they really needed God’s strength. It is not a matter of great strength, not great ability but great dependability. Samson had great ability but poor dependability. A little strength faithfully used means more than much strength flashily and fitfully used.

**Have kept My word and have not denied My name:** The church in Philadelphia was faithful to Jesus and His word. The idea behind “have not denied My name” is not only that they expressed their allegiance to Jesus, but that they lived in a way that was faithful to the name and character of Jesus.

Look at the features of the church in Philadelphia:

- Evangelistic opportunity (I have set before you an open door)
- Reliance on God (You have a little strength)
- Faithfulness to Jesus (have kept My word, and have not denied My name)

In some ways, these features seem unspectacular. They should be commonplace among churches. Yet Jesus was completely pleased with this church. He had nothing negative to say to the church at Philadelphia.

### **What Jesus will do for the Christians of Philadelphia.**

*“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.” (vv9-10)*

Apparently, the Christians in Philadelphia were persecuted by Jewish people (the synagogue). However, these persecuting Jews were Jews in name only (who say they are Jews and are not but lie). In fact, they had no spiritual connection to Abraham or to the people of faith. In this, Jesus did not speak against all Jewish people. It would be entirely wrong to speak of the Jewish people as a whole as the synagogue of Satan or those who say they are Jews and are not. Jesus spoke of this specific group of Jewish people in Philadelphia who persecuted the Christians during that period.

**I will make them come and worship before your feet:** In this, Jesus promised that He would vindicate His people and make sure that their persecutors recognized they were wrong, and that Jesus and His followers were right. The idea is of vindication before self-righteous “spiritual” persecutors. God promised that the church in Philadelphia would be vindicated before their persecutors. 1 Corinthians 14:24-25 speaks of unbelievers falling-down in the midst of Christians to worship God. This establishes

that it wasn't Christians who were being worshipped, but God was worshipped in the presence of Christians.

**And to know that I have loved you:** As those who were once their enemies worshipped alongside them, they were destroyed as enemies. They now knew that Jesus had loved these people they once persecuted. The best way to destroy the enemies of the Gospel is to pray that God would change them into friends.

Jesus also promised them protection from the hour of trial coming on the whole world. Most Bible scholars see this hour of trial as a prophetic reference to the Great Tribulation, which precede Jesus' earthly kingdom. Jesus promised to keep these Christians from that hour of trial.

**To test those who dwell on the earth:** The test is directed against those who dwell on the earth. This phrase is used nine times in the Book of Revelation, and it speaks of those who are not saved in Jesus. Revelation 17:8 makes the term synonymous with the lost: *And those who dwell on the earth will marvel, whose names are not written in the Book of Life from the foundation of the world.* This test is for unbelievers, not Christians.

### **What Jesus wants the church of Philadelphia to do.**

*“Behold, I am coming quickly! Hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown. 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.” (vv11-12)*

First, the church at Philadelphia must remember that Jesus is coming quickly, and they must prepare for His coming. The expression ‘quickly’ is to be understood as something which is sudden and unexpected, not necessarily immediate. The church at Philadelphia must not depart from its solid foundation in Christ. These things as recording in verse 8 can and must continue among the church in Philadelphia, but it will only happen as they hold fast what they have.

If they failed to hold fast, their crown might be given to another. This was not a crown of royalty, given because of royal birth. This was a crown of victory. Jesus encouraged His saints to finish their course with victory, to “play the second half” just as strongly as they “played the first half.” Never forget that the man most likely to steal your crown is yourself. *‘Keep thy heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life’ (Proverbs 4:23).* You are in no greater danger from anyone or anything than from yourself.

**He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar:** Overcomers were told that they would be as a pillar in the temple of My God. Pillars were pictures of strength, stability, and dignified beauty.

**He shall go out no more:** The overcomer would have a place of permanence and stability with God, in contrast to an uncertain place in this world.

**I will write on him the name of My God... I will write on him My new name:** The overcomer also received many names – of God, the New Jerusalem, and the new name of Jesus. These names are marks of identification because they show who we belong to. They are marks of intimacy, because they show we are privileged to know Him in ways others are not.

### **A general exhortation to all who will hear.**

*“He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.” (v13)*

We all want to hear the praise and encouragement Jesus gave to the church at Philadelphia. If we will be like this church, we must stay on their foundation, which was Jesus' name and Jesus' word. We must also depend on their source of strength, which was Jesus, not themselves.