

Revelation A Wednesday Night Bible Study

Lesson #10
Revelation 3:7-13
9/13/2006

Christ's Letter to the Church at Philadelphia

The city of Philadelphia was located in a beautiful valley, which was subject to earthquakes, about 125 miles from the coast and about 28 miles southeast of Sardis. One of those earthquakes totally destroyed it in 17 AD along with several other Lydian cities in the area, after which it was rebuilt by Emperor Tiberius. It was named "Philadelphia" by its founder, King Attalus of Pergamon, in honor of his love for his brother. It, along with Sardis, still exists today as the Turkish city, Alaschir. When it was over run by the Islamic Turks during the wars of the Crusades the Islamists tried to remove every vestige of Christianity.

Even as the church at Thyatira pictures compromise with the pagan world and the church at Sardis pictured the polluted church that resulted from compromise with the pagan world, the church at Philadelphia pictured the revived church that returned to the Word of God, emphasizing the truths of God's Word and God's character. As a result, it became known as "**the missionary church**" and portrays that period of time of church history known as **The Missionary Age** of the church encompassing the time from 1730 AD to about 1900 AD.

Revelation 3:7 And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write; These things saith he that is holy, he that is true, he that hath the key of David, he that openeth, and no man shutteth; and shutteth, and no man openeth;

Revelation 3:8 I know thy works: behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it: for thou hast a little strength, and hast kept my word, and hast not denied my name.

Revelation 3:9 Behold, I will make them of the synagogue of Satan, which say they are Jews, and are not, but do lie; behold, I will make them to come and worship before thy feet, and to know that I have loved thee.

Revelation 3:10 Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth.

Revelation 3:11 Behold, I come quickly: hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown.

Revelation 3:12 Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out: and I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, which is new Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from my God: and I will write upon him my new name.

Revelation 3:13 He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.

CHRIST'S SALUTATION

As He addressed "*the angel*," the pastor of the church, Jesus described Himself as "**These things saith he that is holy, he that is true, he that hath the key of David, he that openeth, and no man shutteth; and shutteth, and no man openeth**" emphasizing His attributes that applied to the church.

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First, Jesus pointed out that He is **"holy,"** His basic attribute that is the foundation of all of His other attributes. **"Holiness"** means otherness, or that God is different from anything in this secular, materialistic, temporal world. Once a church begins to compromise with the world, as the church at Thyatira had done, what was "holy" always becomes unholy, impure, polluted. As seen through out both the Old and New Testaments, God never accepts worship that is compromised with pagan culture. The truth that is seen in history is still true today, i.e., when one mixes the worship of God with the pagan culture around it, the church becomes polluted and the worship of God is translated into the worship of Satan.

The spreading of the gospel message to the unsaved flows naturally from a revived church which results from a focus and feeding on God's Holy Word. Such is also accompanied a renewed and dynamic relationship with our Holy God which evidences itself in a renewal of holiness in life with cultural values that stand in confrontation with the values of paganism. Henry Morris said that **"sound doctrine always generates godly practice; conversely, evil communications corrupt good manners"** (1 Corinthians 15:33) [from The Revelation Record, Henry Morris, page 70].

Thus, because the church at Philadelphia returned to a focus on God's Holy Word it became known as **"the missionary church"** and typifies the time period of church history known as "the modern missionary movement" which is characterized by great, spontaneous outbreaks of missionary activity.

Second, Jesus reminded them that the presentation of the truth is naturally associated with an emphasis upon the holiness of God. When one finds himself focusing on He Who is "Holy" he will not dare to declare anything but the truth of his Holy God. He will not compromise the message of truth to accommodate the appetites of the unholy culture around him. As Paul said to the elders of Ephesus **"... I kept back nothing that was profitable unto you, but have shown you and taught you publicly, and from house to house, testifying both to the Jews and to the Greeks, repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ ... for I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God"** (Acts 20:20-21,27). If one ignores the holiness of God it is impossible to present the truth of God. The reason why the truth of God always is associated with the evangelism of the lost is because the truth of God confronts the sinful hopelessness of man, points him to the Cross of Christ upon which Jesus died as his substitute and from which Jesus offers him forgiveness if he will repent of his sins and confess his total faith in Jesus. Of course, the presentation of the truth of a Holy God must also include the warning that if a man rejects God's offer of grace to forgive and cleanse the sinner with the blood of Jesus, that sinner must spend eternity in a hell prepared for the devil and his angels. He cannot go to heaven because he cannot bring his sinful nature into God's presence and thus he cannot go to heaven. The failure to present these facts is a failure to present the truth of God.

Third, Jesus emphasized His sovereign authority: **"he that hath the key of David, he that openeth, and no man shutteth; and shutteth, and no man openeth."** It was a reference to two previous statements by God. In the first, Isaiah 22:22, God spoke about replacing an unfaithful servant, Shebna, in the house of King Hezekiah with a faithful one, Eliakim. Eliakim would hold the **"key of the house of David,"** specifically referring to the keys to the treasuries of the kings of Judah, but figuratively referring to the responsibilities of godly government. In the second He referred to His statement in Matthew 16:19 where He had said that He would give unto His followers **"the keys of the kingdom of heaven,"**

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referring to the truthful presentation of the gospel that enables a person to be able to get into heaven. In each of these references the individuals to whom the keys are entrusted operate under the sovereign authority of Jesus Christ against which “the gates of hell cannot prevail” (Matthew 16:18). This was certainly applicable to the church at Philadelphia, and to that one of the “modern missionary movement” which would so effectively present the truth of God to a lost and hopeless world.

CHRIST'S COMMENDATION

Jesus had only words of commendation and no condemnation for the church at Philadelphia even as He had no condemnation for the suffering church of Smyrna: **“I know thy works: behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it: for thou hast a little strength, and hast kept my word, and hast not denied my name.”**

“The works” are not described, but they would have been pleasing to the Lord because they flowed out of the devotion to sound doctrine. Thus, God had set before them **“an open door which no man could shut.”** Jesus' statement, **“for thou hast a little strength,”** conveys the thought of **“but little strength,”** as if they were small and insignificant in the eyes of the world. For those who would faithfully serve our Holy God it is worth noting that having **“only a little strength”** for the church at Philadelphia was a positive, not a negative. It has always been so and always will be. From the time of Noah (Genesis 6-9), to Gideon (Judges 6-7), to Jonathan (1 Samuel 14:6) to Paul (2 Corinthians 12:9) God's strength is always “made perfect in weakness.” It is neither wealth, nor numbers, nor popularity in the eyes of the world (Galatians 1:10), nor eloquence in the pulpit, nor talented musicians on the platform that can result in an effective ministry. It is always the Lord alone that determines the validity of the works and “gives the increase” (1 Corinthians 3:7).

Furthermore, a church like the church at Philadelphia **“keeps”** God's Word, is faithful to it and refuses to dilute it for any reason in any manner. **Such a church will not deny His name.** When a church begins to deal loosely with the Word of Christ, it will sooner or later deny the name of Christ.

It is particularly important today to speak and emphasize the name of Jesus Christ in a religious atmosphere where to simply refer to **“God”** can be understood to be a reference to many and various gods. His name stands for His character, which, of course, distinguishes Him from any of the various gods abounding in our world today. **“Jesus”** means **Savior or salvation** and refers to His substitutionary atonement upon the cross. **“Christ”** refers to Him as **“the anointed One”** and acknowledges His personhood as the bodily incarnation of the triune God. **“Lord”** identifies Him as **the Master and Owner** of those who trust Him and obey His Word.

CHRIST'S PROMISE

“Behold, I will make them of the synagogue of Satan, which say they are Jews, and are not, but do lie; behold, I will make them to come and worship before thy feet, and to know that I have loved thee. Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth.”

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Christ's promise was twofold.

First, Jesus told them that He would cause some of those who were of **"the synagogue of Satan"** to **"come and worship before thy feet and to know that I have loved thee."** Though not stated as such, the implication is that some had left the church at Philadelphia to go and worship elsewhere and now some of those would return. It is worth noting that Jesus said that such were **"of the synagogue of Satan,"** clearly implying that such either worshipped God or Satan. There were no other alternatives. It is reasonable to conclude that Jesus' previous description of what pleased Him about the church in Philadelphia was associated with the worship of God and that to depart from that would be to worship Satan. Such is a stinging rebuke of those who are unfaithful. Whatever had caused them to depart is not specified, though it is implied. Neither is stated what would cause the unfaithful ones to return, only that Jesus would cause them to do so. And, as they returned, they would recognize that Jesus loved the church at Philadelphia and always had.

Second, Jesus told them that, because of their faithfulness — **"thou hast kept the word of my patience"** — **"I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth."** This promise has to do with the **"rapture,"** or the time when the Lord catches up all who are His away from this earth prior to the seven-year period of tribulation.

Jesus carefully chosen words make this clear. First, He mentioned **"the hour of temptation."** The word for **"hour"** means a time determined and appointed by God. **"Temptation"** means a trial or proving. We know from Jeremiah 30:7 that this was known as the time of **"Jacob's trouble,"** referring to a time of discipline and trial for the descendants of Jacob. In His reference to **"them that dwell upon the earth"** Jesus uses a very specific word for **"dwelt,"** meaning **"to be at home permanently at a place"** to refer to those people who think of this earth, rather than heaven, as their home. This, of course, reaffirms the pre-millennial, pre-tribulation viewpoint of end times which views the "rapture" as happening prior to the beginning of the seven-year period of tribulation which is described in Matthew 24 and the book of Revelation.

As a part of this promise, Jesus said, **"Behold, I come quickly (suddenly)."** When Jesus comes to catch away His own will be so sudden that it is described in 1 Corinthians 15:52 as **"the twinkling of an eye,"** the smallest possible measurement of time. Those who are ready because they have given their lives to Jesus will suddenly be taken from this earth. Jesus both warns and encourages them. **"Hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take away thy crown."** Don't yield to any temptation to go astray. Be faithful, don't waver! All others will be left behind to go into the time of the **"great tribulation."**

"Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out: and I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, which is new Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from my God: and I will write upon him my new name. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches."

In the spiritual temple now being constructed in heaven, Jesus was securing a place for each of these believers. He would write upon each of them the name of God the Father, the name of the city of God and a new name that Jesus was going to give to each of them.

Hear what He has to say. Hear with a commitment to obedience.