

- ***READ Revelation 1:17-20*** Upon seeing the great vision of Jesus fully glorified, John falls down before Him like a dead man. This same reaction would have been very much appropriate for some of the churches that Jesus goes on to address in **Revelation 2 & 3**. Some of were hanging on, but others of them were on the verge of falling victim to the vengeance of the mighty Son of God because of their rebellion. We couldn't fault the church in Philadelphia for having fear instilled within them as they read these strong messages of admonishment that had been delivered to the churches that came before them within this Revelation.
- And yet just as Jesus seeks to encourage John to not be afraid based upon what he has seen, our Lord seeks to instill encouragement within the hearts of the church in Philadelphia because they were a faithful church in the eyes of their King. This sixth lesson in our series on the churches of Asia Minor who are addressed within the Revelation of Jesus that was delivered to John will focus on the encouraging message that was given to the Christians in Philadelphia.
- There are a number of similarities between this message and the message that was delivered to the church in Smyrna. Neither church is rebuked for harboring false teachers, a lack of spiritual vitality, or failures in their moral integrity. Yet, this was not a church that was without issues. Thankfully, those issues seemed to be coming from outside the church, but Jesus most certainly desires to strengthen and encourage them to continue in their faithfulness through the sharing of this message. Before we get into that message, let's look at some historical background of the ancient city of Philadelphia.

I. Historical Background Of Philadelphia

A. Located about 30 miles southeast of Saris in the Cogamis river valley.

B. The youngest city of the seven cities of Asia Minor, it was named for King Attalus II of Pergamum.

- While some of the other cities in Revelation were built almost 700 years before the birth of Christ, Philadelphia was only a couple of hundred years old by the time Jesus was born. Its name is certainly familiar to us since we have a city by the same name in the state of Pennsylvania, and we are almost certainly familiar with its meaning of "*city of brotherly love.*"
- This ancient city was given then name in honor of Attalus II of Pergamum because he was well known for his loyalty towards his older brother and predecessor King Eumenes. This loyalty earned Attalus the nickname of *Philadelphus* which translates to "*brother lover.*"

C. Philadelphia was very successful in a number of areas such as agriculture, leather working, and nearby hot springs.

- The success in agriculture was a result of the fact that Philadelphia sat on land that had high concentrations of volcanic ash. The city sat on the edge of a region that was known as *Katakekaumene* which translates to "*the burned land.*"
- While they enjoyed the great success in agriculture because of the volcanic ash, the success came at a cost because of the fact that the ash came from volcanic activity that was active within the region. The same earthquake that took out Sardis caused even more damage to Philadelphia because of it being nearer to the fault line. Unfortunately for her citizens, Philadelphia continued to endure years of aftershocks and tremors following this 17AD earthquake.
- One writer said of the Philadelphians, "*For a number of years the people were kept in terror by the continual tremors that plagued the area, and bemused of this fear much of the populace lived in huts in the adjacent countryside outside the city.*" (Haily, page 149)

- D. It was a very important city for the advancement of Greek culture eastward, and it also held great allegiance to Rome because of her help rebuilding from earthquakes.
- Yet, this fear did not stop Philadelphia from being an all important city when it came to the spread of Greek culture. Another writer said, *“The city of Philadelphia was founded to spread Greek Civilization eastward. It was an “open door” for the advancement of both language and culture.”* (Erhardt, page 72)
 - Because of its strategic position on some of the most important trade routes, Rome was quick to rebuild Philadelphia following its earthquakes, and the city showed gratitude by establishing a temple for the Roman Caesars, Emperor Tiberias specifically. They even went so far as to rename the city *“Neocaesarea”* (New City of the Caesar) for a time. There were also a number of other name changes that would be made to Philadelphia.
 - Philadelphia was also home to a high volume of pagan temples, so much so that the city was sometimes referred to as *“Little Athens.”* The main pagan deity was that of Dionysus who was the god of wine which ties in with their success in agriculture. We can also assume there was a Jewish population in the city based upon what Jesus says later concerning some who call themselves Jews but were not actually Jews.
- E. Like many of the other Asian churches, it is believed that Philadelphia was founded during Paul’s Ephesian Ministry.
- F. History tells us there were Christians in Philadelphia (now modern day Alasehir) until the 13th or 14th century.
- To exist all the way into the mid 2nd millennium is quite an accomplishment considering the heavy Muslim influence that would have taken over that area. But maybe their success was due to their perseverance that is discussed in this message. Tradition even tells us that some of the Christians in Philadelphia were martyred alongside the early church father, Polycarp.

II. Jesus’s Message To Philadelphia

- A. Jesus doesn’t refer to His opening description in chapter 1, but instead He alludes to His authentic deity and authority over His people.
1. In this message to Philadelphia, Jesus describes Himself differently than He has in the five previous messages. While usually pulling from the descriptions of **1:12-16**, here Jesus describes Himself as *“the Holy One, the True One, the One who has the key of David.”*
 2. Let’s first notice the description of being the *“True One.”* I believe Jesus uses this description to simply denote the fact that He is legitimate, genuine, and authentic. Unlike the false pagan gods that could be found all over Philadelphia, Jesus is authentic in who He claims to be.
 3. One claim He makes is to being the *“Holy One.”* What proof do we have to show that Jesus is truly the Holy One, the One who is unblemished and perfect? We need only look back at Jesus’s time on earth to see that others recognized Him as such.
 - a) ***“The angel replied to her: “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. Therefore, the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God.” (Luke 1:35)***
 - b) ***“From that moment many of his disciples turned back and no longer accompanied him. So Jesus said to the Twelve, “You don’t want to go away too, do you?” **Simon Peter answered**, “Lord, to whom will we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and know that you are the Holy One of God.” (John 6:66-69)***
 - c) ***“In the synagogue there was a man with **an unclean demonic spirit who cried out with a loud voice**, “Leave us alone! What do you have to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are—the Holy One of God!” (Luke 4:33,34)***

4. Additionally, Jesus refers to Himself as *“the One who has the key of David.”* This language comes from what is written in **Isaiah 22:15-25**. In this text, God is judging a steward named Shebna who had abused the position he was given over the palace. This position was then given to the king’s steward Eliakim. In this position, Eliakim would have the ability to determine who was allowed to go into the presence of the king. Jesus applying this to Himself must be an expression of His absolute authority over His kingdom and His churches. He alone has the power to open and close the doors to His Kingdom.
 5. For Jesus to speak of Himself in such terms was certainly establishing Himself as someone who ought to be listened to because what He was about to say truly mattered and carried great weight behind it. This means that the upcoming words of commendation and promise need to be believed and trusted because as Jesus is about to say... *“I know your works.”* But what works within Philadelphia were Jesus aware of?
- B. He gives three commendations to these brethren:**
1. *“You have little power...”*
 - a) We might immediately think that this statement was a slight towards the disciples in Philadelphia, but I believe this is simply a statement that these brethren were not mighty by the standards of the culture around them. It might have been that the church in Philadelphia was very few in number and therefore not very “powerful.”
 - b) It could also be that those who made up the church in Philadelphia were not powerful from a socioeconomic perspective. It would not be out of the ordinary for Christians in a local church to be those who were extremely poor or even living as slaves. For Jesus to say that He knew they had little power wasn’t a slight, but it was simply an acknowledgement of the position that these brethren found themselves in and that was perfectly ok! Jesus was proud of them for their strong faith though they were weak in power or position.
 - c) *“Brothers and sisters, consider your calling: Not many were wise from a human perspective, not many powerful, not many of noble birth. Instead, God has chosen what is foolish in the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen what is weak in the world to shame the strong. God has chosen what is insignificant and despised in the world—what is viewed as nothing—to bring to nothing what is viewed as something, so that no one may boast in his presence.” (I Corinthians 1:26-29)*
 2. *“You have kept my word...”*
 - a) Jesus also commends them for their willingness to keep His Word. How was it that Jesus knew of their spiritual strength, conviction, and love for Jesus? It must have been for their willingness to continually obey Jesus in every matter. They knew what had been divinely given to men, and they were committed to a life of obedience to the Lord.
 - b) Their willingness to do so only followed the commands of Jesus that He spoke during His earthly ministry. Jesus said in **John 14:23,24**, *“Jesus answered, “If anyone loves me, he will keep my word. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. The one who doesn’t love me will not keep my words. The word that you hear is not mine but is from the Father who sent me.”* These brethren could be counted as those who were loving Jesus because they were willing to keep and obey His Word.
 3. *“You have not denied My name...”*
 - a) Lastly, Jesus commends these brethren because they were willing to remain loyal to Jesus above all other powers and authorities that were around them regardless of the external pressure.
 - b) Jesus was their Lord and King, and they weren’t willing to give up that place to anyone else. No one had the power that Jesus possessed to sustain them, and they weren’t giving Him up.

C. He also offers three promises of encouragement for these brethren:

1. *"I have placed before you an open door that no one can close..."*

- a) Because of the great faith that had been on display within the church in Philadelphia, Jesus was ready to encourage these brethren to continue in this great faith by giving them insight into how He was blessing them & how He was going to bless them as they moved forward.
- b) We noted earlier how Jesus alone was the One who holds the key of David in His hands and has the authority to open up the kingdom of heaven to whomever He chooses. This statement that Jesus had set that open door in front of them would have encouraged them as they continued to work their way toward judgment. They knew that they only needed to be concerned with Jesus and how he viewed their faithfulness.
- c) However, I believe there is another possible layer to this encouragement, and it centers around the opportunity that the Philadelphians had in showing this open door to others around them. I believe Jesus very well might be playing on the idea of Philadelphia being the "open door of Greek culture" by stating that in reality Philadelphia was a place where an open door for the Gospel was present.
- d) This wouldn't be the only time that such language about doors would have been used in writings concerning the Gospel which gives further evidence that Jesus was encouraging these brethren (and us!) to be aware of the opportunities that were before them and take great advantage of them.

(1) *"But I will stay in Ephesus until Pentecost, because a wide door for effective ministry has opened for me—yet many oppose me." (I Corinthians 16:8,9)*

(2) *"When I came to Troas to preach the gospel of Christ, even though the Lord opened a door for me, I had no rest in my spirit because I did not find my brother Titus. Instead, I said good-bye to them and left for Macedonia." (II Corinthians 2:12,13)*

(3) *"Devote yourselves to prayer; stay alert in it with thanksgiving. At the same time, pray also for us that God may open a door to us for the word, to speak the mystery of Christ, for which I am in chains, so that I may make it known as I should." (Colossians 4:2-4)*

2. *"I will make them come and bow down at your feet, and they will know that I have loved you."*

- a) This statement is made in reference to the *"synagogue of Satan"* that is mentioned in **3:9**, and it is not the first time that such a thing has been mentioned. If we remember back to **Revelation 2:9**, we will find this same language and see that the church in Smyrna was seemingly facing opposition from the local Jews who wanted to resist the spread of the movement of Christianity. From the earliest day so the church, even back to the ministry of Jesus, the Jewish leaders and hard-hearted common Jews wanted nothing more than for this message of the coming kingdom to be snuffed out. For their resistance to the truth, Jesus strongly rebukes them by referring to them as people who were only doing what their father the devil desired for them to do. (**John 8:41-44**)
- b) It was the belief of these types of people that those who were God's true people were those who gave efforts to uphold the Law of Moses in all respects, but they failed to recognize that the Law had been given for the purpose of bringing God's people up to the point of the introduction of the Messiah and a new covenant through Him. In **Galatians 3:23-28**, Paul plainly details God's plan in regards to the Law and what caused for a person to be a true heir or descendant of Abraham. *"Before this faith came, we were confined under the law, imprisoned until the coming faith was revealed. The law, then, was our guardian until Christ, so that we could be justified by faith. But since that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian, for through faith you are all sons of God in Christ Jesus.*

For those of you who were baptized into Christ have been clothed with Christ. There is no Jew or Greek, slave or free, male and female; since you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, heirs according to the promise."

c) So what was Jesus going to do about these Jews who were causing problems for His people? He says that he would cause for them to bow down at the feet of His people so that they might know that Jesus approved of them and loved them. For Jesus to say that these Jews would bow down before His disciples could be understood in a couple of different ways.

(1) Firstly, it could be understood as Jesus saying that some of these persecutors could themselves one day humble themselves as disciples of Jesus. Though they had once stood in a very prideful and arrogant way before Jesus, they would eventually humble themselves before Him in faith and repentance.

(2) Or this statement could be in reference to the final judgment when all people (Jews included) who reject Jesus, even those Jews in Philadelphia, would fall down before Jesus and confess Him as Lord. **(Philippians 2:9,10)**

d) We would hope that the former would be the true fulfillment of this promise, but we recognize that the latter is a strong possibility, as well. Regardless of which way this promise was going to be fulfilled, His people would end up vindicated as those who had been faithful to the authentic Son of God and His will for them in this life.

3. *"I will keep you from the hour of testing that is going to come on the whole world to test those who live on the earth."* **(3:10)**

a) This faithfulness to Jesus would eventually pay off for the brethren in Philadelphia because Jesus states that He would keep them from the hour of testing that would come upon the whole rest of the world. There is simply not much to go off of in this verse that points us towards exactly what Jesus is referring to.

b) It does seem like this testing would be for a set period of time and not enduring since it is described as an *"hour of testing"*, but the subject of the testing isn't certain since the whole world could reference the entire earth or just those who are separated from Christ. Could this be some sort of natural disaster that would plague Philadelphia that the Lord would protect them from? This is a possibility. Or it could be some world-wide event that the Christians would avoid harm from since they were not entangled in the affairs of men.

c) We simply don't know what exactly they would be delivered from, but we do know two things. Firstly, we know they were being delivered because of their continued endurance in their faith. They were working so hard for Jesus, and Jesus was going to reward them in this fashion which is the second thing we know. We know for certain that if Jesus promised such a thing to these brethren then it was going to come to pass. What encouragement to know that Jesus was going to be right there with you and delivering you when a great hour testing is coming down all around you!

D. He finishes by stating two rewards for those who do not allow the enemy to take their crowns:

1. *"I will make a pillar in the temple of My God, and he will never go out again."*

a) Those who would persevere and hold on to their crowns in the face of persecution would be granted great rewards that are reserved only for the faithful of God. For Jesus to say that these people would be made pillars in God's temple and they would never have to go out again would certainly sound very appealing in the ears of brethren in Philadelphia.

b) Don't forget that this city was constantly rocked with instability because of the continued presence of earthquakes. They could look forward to a place they would never have to leave. A place of permanent residence within the new Jerusalem where God reigns!

2. *"I will write on him the name of My God and the name of the city of My God...and My new name."*
- a) Lastly, they would have three precious inscriptions written upon them that would indicate ownership, citizenship, and fellowship.
- (1) These brethren would have the *"the name of My God"* written upon them to show that this person belongs to the God of heaven.
 - (2) They would have *"the name of the city of My God—the new Jerusalem"* written upon them to show that they were people who had eternal residence with God.
 - (3) They would have *"My new name"* written on them which was a name Jesus would establish for them. Again, for a city that had undergone so many name changes, it sure would have been nice to know that they would gain a name that not only showed their fellowship with God, but it would also last forever.
- b) These great and magnificent promises were not only reserved for those in Philadelphia, but they were also reserved for those in Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, and Laodicea if they would overcome their struggles on this earth and conquer with the strength that Jesus was ready and willing to supply to them.

It can certainly be difficult at times to know of your faithfulness to Jesus and yet continue to struggle in different ways within our faiths because of the pressures that are being applied for all sides around us. These were certainly the feelings of the brethren in Philadelphia, and yet this message was given to them so that they might know that their Lord was aware of their faithfulness and struggles. He knew of the commendable attributes they possessed, and He was ready to strengthen and aid them as they fought for their faiths. This encouraging message to Philadelphia remains for us today, and may we keep it in mind as we go throughout this week striving to ourselves be faithful disciples and a faithful church before our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ who are striving to hold on to our crowns with everything we have within us by the strength that our God supplies.