

I. Introduction

- A. Open to Revelation 3:7 (Today: using Christian Standard Version, CSB)
- B. We're going a little out of order this morning because Kyle is traveling ... skipping to the church of Philadelphia and next week Kyle will go back and cover the letter to Sardis.
- C. Philadelphia and Smyrna
 - 1. No correction or rebuke
 - 2. Don't assume perfection, but we look for what to emulate. Churches, though filled with imperfect people, truly can please Jesus.
- D. Contextual background
 - 1. Where is Philadelphia
 - a. It is the sixth of the seven churches on this circuit John wrote to.
 - b. The city: Plenty of wealth and power (because of location). The church: not so much
 - 2. Situation of the Church
 - a. Likely small in number and had very little power or influence. They had been worshiping in a Jewish synagogue.
 - b. In many places throughout the Roman Empire, Christians met in synagogues, rightly believing Jesus was the fulfillment God's work with the Jews.
 - c. But it seems that here in Philadelphia (just like Smyrna) that the majority of Jews here were rejecting Jesus as the Messiah and therefore shutting the synagogue doors on the Christians. This was not just a loss of meeting space.
 - 1) In the Roman Empire, Jews who participated in worship at synagogues had religious exemption from worshiping the emperor. They were not required to worship in pagan temples or claim that Caesar was Lord.
 - 2) Being expelled was the loss of their exemption to emperor worship. They could now be arrested for denying Caesar's Lordship in loyalty to Jesus.¹
 - d. This passage: Multiple references to open and shut doors. This is the context.
 - e. This could easily have led to fear and even second guessing about their faith in Jesus. "What if we're wrong and the Jews who reject Him are right?"

II. But Jesus writes this letter to the Philadelphian Christians to give them strength to persevere to the end.

- A. *Write to the angel of the church in Philadelphia: Thus says the Holy One, the true One, the One Who has the key of David, Who opens and no one will close, and Who closes and no one opens: (Revelation 3:7)*
 - 1. Jesus is "the Holy One." He is God.
 - a. This is a typical title for God (e.g., Isaiah 40:25; Habakkuk 3:3; Mark 1:24; John 6:69) Mounce, Robert H. 1997. [The Book of Revelation](#).

¹ Keener, Craig S. 1993. [The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament](#).

- b. In using this title for Jesus, John is claiming that Jesus is divine.
 - c. Also, that the divine characteristic of holiness belongs to Him.
 - d. He is pure, righteous, just, and in a class of His own (along with the Father and Spirit).
 - 2. Jesus is “the True One.” He is the genuine Messiah.
 - a. The specific word² translated here as “true” usually has the sense of “genuine” or even “trustworthy.”
 - b. Not only is Jesus truthful and the giver of truth but He is the the Authentic Messiah... He’s the “real deal”
 - c. This title – “the True One” – is reinforcing Jesus’ identity as the genuine Messiah, no matter what unbelieving Jews would claim.
 - 3. Jesus “has the key of David.” He has complete authority in the Kingdom of God.
 - a. John is borrowing this reference to the “key of David” from Isaiah 22.
 - 1) Here Isaiah prophesies that the king’s right hand man, Shebna, will have his power taken away and given to a man named Eliakim.
 - 2) *And he shall be ^ca father to the inhabitants of Jerusalem and to the house of Judah. And I will place ^don his shoulder the key of the house of David. ^fHe shall open, and none shall shut; and he shall shut, and none shall open. (Isaiah 22:21-22)*
 - 3) Eliakim has “the keys to the kingdom” and all that come in and out of it do so under his authority.
 - b. The picture, then, is that Jesus has received authority in God’s Kingdom that has been stripped from another.
 - c. Jesus is the RIGHTFUL wielder of authority, not pretenders or those who reject Him as Messiah (as did the Jewish religious structure).
 - 4. “Who opens and no one will shut, Who shuts and no one opens.”
 - a. These followers of Jesus had been shut out of the synagogue by those who had no right to reject them.
 - b. Jesus is claiming that HE ALONE holds the keys to the Kingdom of God.
 - c. In essence, Jesus is quoting Himself from John 10:9-10: “I am the door (same word: Thura). *If anyone enters by me, ^che will be saved and will go in and out and ^dfind pasture. The thief comes only to steal and ^ekill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.*”
 - d. Jesus alone decides who is in and who is out of the Kingdom. Access to the Kingdom of God is through Jesus alone. Not what a local synagogue leader allows or disallows. Not some preacher on TV or the internet.
- B. *I know your works. Look, I have placed before you an open door that no one can close because you have but little power; yet you have kept My Word and have not denied My name. (Revelation 3:8)*
- 1. What works? “You have kept My Word and have not denied My name.”

² ἀληθινός

- a. It is a hard enough thing to stay faithful to God. But the Philadelphians do it additionally from a place of “little power.”
 - b. Despite being in a weak position in their society, they have both obeyed Jesus’ commands and have not been ashamed of Him. They have not hidden that they belong to Jesus.
 2. Jesus is pleased when His followers obey His Word and are unashamed of belonging to Him.
 - a. What the Philadelphians don’t have in power and influence, they DO have in faith and FAITHFULNESS.
 - b. Jesus is rewarding their faithfulness with an open door. They are shut out of the synagogue but the doors to the Kingdom of God are thrown wide open!
 3. Not only do those faithful to Jesus have an open door into the Kingdom of God, but they also have the duty and privilege to usher others through that door.
 - a. This open door is for the faithful and for those to whom the faithful would faithfully share the Gospel.
 - b. This promise of the “open door” is an exhortation to disciple-making.
 - 1) No matter what doors are closed in the Christians’ faces, they are not closed to those who would hear the Gospel and believe.
 - 2) In Acts 14:27, Paul reports to the believers in Antioch that God had “opened a door of faith to the Gentiles.”
 4. Resistance to the Gospel should never quench our conviction to make disciples and our faith that Jesus will bring them in!
- C. Note this: *I will make those from the synagogue of Satan, who claim to be Jews and are not, but are lying—I will make them come and bow down at your feet, and they will know that I have loved you. (Revelation 3:9)*
1. Synagogue of Satan”?
 - a. The Jews who rejected Jesus thought they were running a synagogue for God.
 - b. But Satan is Jesus’ ultimate adversary. Rejecting and rebelling against Jesus is a trait of the enemy. Sadly, that was the state of this specific synagogue.
 - c. John also claims that these people were lying when they claim to be Jews.
 - 1) Is he questioning their ethnicity or religious heritage?
 - 2) No. It actually reminds us of what Paul said in Romans 2:28
 - d. Romans 2:28 - *For ^sno one is a Jew ^twho is merely one outwardly, nor is circumcision outward and physical. But a Jew is one ^uinwardly, and ^vcircumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter.*
 - 1) The Jews were God’s chosen people, but to claim to be of God’s people, and yet deny God’s Messiah, Jesus, God in the flesh, is a contradiction in terms.
 - 2) Paul (and John!) are not denying the ethnicity of these Jews but rather their faithfulness to Yahweh because of their rejection of Jesus. You cannot be faithful to Yahweh while rejecting Jesus.
 2. A warning against false interpretation: People have tried to use Revelation among other Scriptures to justify their antisemitism. This is evil and should never be tolerated by followers of Jesus.

- a. Rather, the authors of Scripture are teaching that no person can claim good standing with God based on ethnicity but by FAITH alone.
 - b. The sin of these Jews had NOTHING to do with their ethnicity. It was their rejection of Jesus and their mistreatment of Jesus' followers.
3. See how tragic it is when the people of God believe they are doing the work of God by resisting God.
 - a. This happens when we deny that Jesus – His Kingship, His Word, His truth and His mission – are at the center of all we do.
 - b. Warning: If we lose the centrality of Jesus, His commands and His mission, we can unwittingly become a synagogue of Satan.
- D. *Because you have kept my command to endure, I will also keep you from the hour of testing that is going to come on the whole world to test those who live on the Earth.* (Revelation 3:10)
 1. Because of their faithfulness, Jesus promises these persecuted Christians that He will protect them through hardship that is about to come.
 2. Now, some have interpreted this verse to mean that Christians will be raptured out of the world before the Great Tribulation in the end times. And I understand why they might see it that way.
 - a. There are many incredibly godly and brilliant scholars and pastors who take this position, and I respect their scholarship.
 - b. But I do have to disagree with that interpretation of this verse for two reasons:
 - 1) This promise was made to Philadelphian Christians living in the first century through a letter written specifically to them, but the great tribulation has not happened yet. So if Jesus is promising to rapture these 1st century Christians away from the great tribulation, but it hasn't happened yet, then this is an unfulfilled and unfulfillable promise.
 - 2) Also, in Jesus' letter to Smyrna, He uses this same word for "testing" as He does to the Philadelphians. And yet to the believers in Smyrna, He tells them that they will suffer this testing. Will Jesus rapture some Christians out of the tribulation and let others stay through it? This can't be supported with Scripture.
 3. And so our best interpretation of this verse is that the Roman world would experience some kind of difficulty and that Jesus would protect the Philadelphian church through it.
 4. And so now we come to Jesus' encouragement to the Philadelphians (and to us!) as they persevere through hardship until the end:
- E. *I am coming soon. Hold on to what you have, so that no one takes your crown. The one who conquers I will make a pillar in the temple of My God, and he will never go out again. 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 My new name. Let anyone who has ears to hear listen to what the Spirit says to the churches.* (Revelation 3:11-13)
 1. I am coming soon: Jesus' return is an anchor for our perseverance, our obedience to His commands and our faithfulness to Him.

2. Crown: (Stephanos)- this is a victor's crown.
 - a. Received after a race or military exploits
 - b. There is great reward for those who hold on to Jesus to the end of the race.
3. Jesus then uses the metaphor of pillars in God's temple to describe those who persevere.
 - a. This is about permanence. Pillars aren't taken in and out of the building they support. They stay in that place permanently.
 - b. Even though the Christians were ousted from the Jewish synagogues, they will never be ousted from the house of God.
 - c. And to further illustrate this truth of their permanence and belonging in God's house, Jesus says that God's name, God's city's name and His own name will be inscribed on them.
 - d. Scholar Robert Mounce: "They permanently, irrevocably belong to Jesus and will never be cast out as they were from the synagogue."³
 - e. "You may not be able to even cross the threshold of the synagogue of Satan, but you will be a PILLAR in the house of God."

III. Conclusion

- A. We stand on the shoulders of countless Christians across the world and down through the centuries who have paid the price for "keeping (Jesus') Word and not denying His name."
- B. How does a person stand firm when the doors of society, economy, and even physical safety are shut in their face because of their loyalty to Jesus? Some of the answers to this are right in this text:
 1. v. 11: I am coming soon. Hold fast what you have, so that no one may seize your crown.
 2. What do we have?
 - a. v. 8: have kept My Word and have not denied My name.
 - b. We have His Word (His commands and mission, through the Scriptures).
 - c. We have His name (we belong to Him, He is ours and we are His).
 - d. In other words, we have Jesus Himself and we have Jesus' commands.
 3. Notice what Jesus says right before saying "Hold fast to what you have ...": He says "I am coming soon." The most valuable treasure we have is Jesus Himself and the promise of His return – the blessed Hope.
- C. What we need to persevere (not an exhaustive list, but what is shown here):
 1. The commands of Jesus in His Word
 2. Intimacy with Jesus
 3. The return of Jesus
- D. Christian, you will endure whatever hardship or test or trial, not because you have enough strength or will-power alone. You will endure because you have God's Word, you have Jesus Himself and He is returning
- E. I want to end by reading you an excerpt from one of Corrie Ten-Boom's books. Corrie and her family had opened their door to Jews and hid them when the Third Reich was seeking them out for extermination in Holland. When they were caught, she and her sister Betsy

³ Mounce, Robert H. 1997. [*The Book of Revelation*](#).

were sent to a concentration camp where her sister died. Corrie was ultimately released and went on to live a life of ministry for Jesus.

In America, the churches sing, "Let the congregation escape tribulation", but in China and Africa the tribulation has already arrived. This last year alone more than two hundred thousand Christians were martyred in Africa. Now things like that never get into the newspapers because they cause bad political relations. But I know. I have been there. We need to think about that when we sit down in our nice houses with our nice clothes to eat our steak dinners. Many, many members of the Body of Christ are being tortured to death at this very moment, yet we continue right on as though we are all going to escape the tribulation.

Several years ago I was in Africa in a nation where a new government had come into power. The first night I was there some of the Christians were commanded to come to the police station to register. When they arrived they were arrested and that same night they were executed. The next day the same thing happened with other Christians. The third day it was the same. All the Christians in the district were being systematically murdered.

The fourth day I was to speak in a little church. The people came, but they were filled with fear and tension. All during the service they were looking at each other, their eyes asking, "Will this one I am sitting beside be the next one killed? Will I be the next one?"

The room was hot and stuffy with insects that came through the screenless windows and swirled around the naked bulbs over the bare wooden benches. I told them a story out of my childhood.

"When I was a little girl," I said, "I went to my father and said, 'Daddy, I am afraid that I will never be strong enough to be a martyr for Jesus Christ.'"

"Tell me," said Father, "When you take a train trip to Amsterdam, when do I give you the money for the ticket? Three weeks before?"

"No, Daddy, you give me the money for the ticket just before we get on the train."

"That is right," my father said, "and so it is with God's strength. Our Father in Heaven knows when you will need the strength to be a martyr for Jesus Christ. He will supply all you need - just in time."

My African friends were nodding and smiling. Suddenly a spirit of joy descended upon that church and the people began singing, "In the sweet, by and by, we shall meet on that beautiful shore."

Later that week, half the congregation of that church was executed. I heard later that the other half was killed some months ago. But I must tell you something. I was so happy that the Lord

used me to encourage these people, for unlike many of their leaders, I had the word of God. I had been to the Bible and discovered that Jesus said He had not only overcome the world, but to all those who remained faithful to the end, He would give a crown of life.

How can we get ready for the persecution? First we need to feed on the word of God, digest it, make it a part of our being. This will mean disciplined Bible study each day as we not only memorize long passages of Scripture, but put the principles to work in our lives.

Next we need to develop a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Not just the Jesus of yesterday, the Jesus of History, but the life-changing Jesus of today who is still alive and sitting at the right hand of God.

We must be filled with the Holy Spirit. This is no optional command of the Bible, it is absolutely necessary. Those earthly disciples could never have stood up under the persecution of the Jews and Romans had they not waited for Pentecost. Each of us needs our own personal Pentecost, the baptism of the Holy Spirit. We will never be able to stand in the tribulation without it. In the coming persecution we must be ready to help each other and encourage each other. But we must not wait until the tribulation comes before starting. The fruit of the Spirit should be the dominant force of every Christian's life.

Many are fearful of the coming tribulation, they want to run. I, too, am a little bit afraid when I think that after all my eighty years, including the horrible Nazi concentration camp, that I might have to go through the tribulation also. But then I read the Bible and I am glad.

When I am weak, then I shall be strong, the Bible says. Betsy and I were prisoners for the Lord, we were so weak, but we got power because the Holy Spirit was on us. That mighty inner strengthening of the Holy Spirit helped us through. No, you will not be strong in yourself when the tribulation comes. Rather, you will be strong in the power of Him Who will not forsake you. For seventy-six years I have known the Lord Jesus and not once has He ever left me, or let me down.

"Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him", for I know that to all who overcome, He shall give the crown of life. Hallelujah!

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