

**Philadelphia: The Church That Was Built To  
Stay  
Revelation 3:7-13**

On the side of our house we have a sliding glass door. For whatever reason known only to the previous owner, the part that slides was completely caulked shut. Unless and until I remove the caulk that door will not open. Maybe you have a door that you can't open. Or maybe you have a door that won't stay shut, try as you might it won't stay latched.

The church of Philadelphia was presented with doors that were open and shut. In a figurative picture Jesus wants to reveal some things to them about open and closed doors. There's a correlation to us today – this idea of closed and opened doors. Take your Bible and let's find out more about this church and these doors.

**Revelation 3:7-13**

An ideal city

The identity of Christ

An illustrious church

An inherited citizenship

**I. AN IDEAL CITY – v. 7a**

The city of Philadelphia was about 30 miles southeast of Sardis. Philadelphia, which means city of brotherly love, was the youngest of the seven cities mentioned in Revelation 2 and 3. It was built in 189 B.C. and named after Attalus Philadelphus who was king of Pergamum as a way to honor him.

Because of its many temples it came to be known as little Athens.

Because of its importance in spreading the Greek culture to the regions of Lydia and Phrygia it was known as the missionary city. Perhaps that is why Christ speaks about the church as having open doors. It was said that from the church in Philadelphia the Gospel spread into India.

Because it was strategically positioned on a route that stretched from Rome in the West and the interior of Asia to the East it was called the Gateway of the East.

There was a nearby mountain range that left rich deposits of fertile soil from volcanic activity. This rich soil made the area ideal for growing grapes, which was its chief commodity. The grapes were of such great quality that they competed for the market with grapes from Rome. The vineyards in Philadelphia were ordered to be cut down by the Emperor to eliminate Rome's competition in the market.

Given its prolific production of grapes the chief deity of the city was Dionysus the god of wine and pleasure. It is said that wine, music and ecstatic dance freed his followers from self-conscious fear and care, and subverted the oppressive restraints of the powerful. Those who partook of his mysteries were possessed and empowered by the god himself.

There is one more thing about the city that you should know. Even though the city was surrounded by fertile soil, it was built on a fault line and subject to earthquakes and aftershocks. Because of the severe damage done by earthquakes the Christians would understand Jesus' reference to pillars in this letter. So devastating to the city was one particular earthquake that Rome exempted Philadelphia from paying tribute for five years to allow the city to get back on its feet. The city hoped Rome would assist with monetary gifts. Those monies never came and it was left to rebuild on its own. They felt betrayed as a city. Because of the fear of earthquakes many people relocated to the surrounding area.

But Philadelphia was more than just an ideal city and a gateway to the interior. It had spiritual doors that were open to it. To help us understand that better, let's consider the identity of Christ as He reveals Himself to this church.

## II. THE IDENTITY OF CHRIST – v. 7b

As we have discovered in each letter, in some way Christ reveals Himself in a specific way to help that particular church understand who He is and what He wants them to know about Him to help them with regard to something they are going through.

I think He does the same for us. In some way He reveals something about Himself that we need at a very particular time in our life, something to remind us of who He is, that He knows our needs and understands where we are. In some way this revelation of Himself is just what we need for the moment. Maybe that's happened to you. If we are looking, Christ does reveal Himself.

This last week I received some news that left me discouraged, disheartened, and a bit overwhelmed. I think you have all been there at one time or another and perhaps even many times, maybe even right now. You get some bad news or some event happens that leaves you with lots of questions and no answers. Your head spins from the wondering. You don't sleep well. You feel tired all the time. **Am I describing anyone like that this morning?**

So there I was feeling quite melancholy. After several days a revelation of Christ came to me through an email. I was working on the message and happened to check email for a quick mental break and there was a note from someone. I wasn't sure I wanted to open it up right then because I was working on the message. But I did and read a simple but powerful story about sandpipers. Its plain message revealed to me the identity of Christ who gives me joy in all circumstances.

Earlier in the week I finished a book. At its conclusion there was a prayer. I copied the prayer and stuck it in my Bible as a reminder to me that in whatever I need Christ is there. It has become my prayer. Maybe it's a way for you to see Christ revealed in some way just when you need Him.

*"I commit into Your hands Your servant. In his weakness, be to him a strength. In his not knowing, be to him his assurance. Cause him to walk in the footsteps You've prepared beforehand. Pour out upon him the Spirit of Your anointing that he might fulfill Your charge. Guide him. Protect him. Prepare his hands for battle. Bless and keep him. Cause the light of Your countenance to shine upon him. Spread over his life the tabernacle of Your glory, and shelter him in the covering our Your grace, in the name of the Anointed One, the Glory of Israel, the Light of the World."*

Christ reveals Himself to His Church to encourage us. How Christ reveals Himself today to me will be different tomorrow because my needs and circumstances will have changed. Christ who does not change will in some reveal a part of His unchanging nature that is specific to us and our situation at that time if we will but take the time to look. **Would you agree with me?**

**How does Christ Identify Himself to this church to help them with what they are going through?**  
**"These are the words of Him who is holy and true, who holds the key of David. What He opens no one can shut, and what he shuts no one can open."**

First of all He reveals Himself as holy. By that He means that is morally perfect, without any flaw, sinless. That's important. If He weren't holy we couldn't or wouldn't be saved. If He were not holy He could not offer these Christians a home in the Temple of God. Christ was, is and always will be holy. That will never change.

Not a one of us can say that. We are all sinners. David says he was born in sin. Paul says we have all sinned. We are born that way, but not Jesus. When He was conceived it was through the work of the Holy Spirit so that He would be without sin in His birth. When the angel visited Mary to inform her that she had been chosen to bear the Messiah,

she asked how it would happen. Here's the angels reply from **Luke 1:35**: **"The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy One to be born will be called the Son of God."** (Emphasis added)  
He was holy in birth.

He was holy in life.

**Hebrews 7:26** **"Such a high priest meets our need – one who is holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners, exalted above the heavens."**

**I Peter 1:18-19** **"For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect."**

**I Peter 3:18** **"For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous..."**

He was holy in life.

He was holy at death.

**Acts 2:27** **"You will not abandon Me to the grave, nor will You let Your Holy One see decay."**

Scripture throughout declares the holiness of God. Isaiah was given a vision of God's glory and in that vision he saw angels around God declaring to one another **"Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty; the whole earth is full of His glory."** (**Isaiah 6:3**)

It is the same message voiced by the four living creatures **"who day and night never stop saying: 'Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come.'" (Revelation 4:8)**

In **Mark 1:22** we find Jesus in Capernaum on the Sabbath visiting the synagogue. Mark's account says that a demon possessed man in the synagogue stood up and asked Christ not to destroy him before

the appointed time. He called Jesus **"the Holy One of God."**

That He is holy gives Him the right to judge the church without partiality and to judge it perfectly. He is the standard by which judgment will be meted out and He is the standard by which we can only enter heaven. He is holy. (Repeat that.)

Not only is He holy, our passage also says that He is true. It's a word that means to be genuine or authentic. It implies that He is wholly reliable and trustworthy. He will never let us down. That's a word of encouragement to this church in Philadelphia because Rome had let the city down. Rome may have made promises to them, but didn't keep them. They knew what it was like to be abandoned. In effect Jesus was saying that He would never go back on His word because His holy nature won't allow it and His word is always trustworthy. He won't ever say one thing and do another. There is not one instance in all of Scripture where you will be able to debate the trustworthiness of His word.

Before ascending into heaven He gave His disciples one last word of encouragement. He said He would be with them to the end of the age. The writer of **Hebrews (13:5)** reminds us that He will never leave us or forsake us. The Psalmist assures that even in the shadow of death, the Lord our shepherd is there.

Let this be of comfort to you that no matter what you are going through today, Christ will be with you, even when He seems silent or distant. Somewhere there is a reminder of His presence, a reminder that He will keep His word, a reminder that He is true. Take the time to look for His presence and His promise. When the sky looks darkest the rainbow is a reminder of His promise. He is utterly and completely dependable. The prophet Jeremiah reminds us that His faithfulness is great. (**Lamentations 3:22-23**)

When the earthquakes of life create chaos, the faithful true and holy Christ is there.

When the disciples feared what might happen to them after He disclosed to them that He was about to leave them, Jesus told them not to be afraid, that if they followed Him, they would one day be with Him. Thomas wasn't quite sure how they would know the way and Jesus said they already knew the way because He was the Way, the Truth and the Life. **(John 14:6)**

**John 1:14 says "And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us (and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father), full of grace and truth."**

John uses the word truth 25 times in his gospel associating it with Jesus and His faithfulness. Whenever you doubt, come back to His Word because Jesus is truth.

Verse 8 then also speaks about the power and authority Jesus has. **"...who holds the keys of David. What He opens no one can shut, and what He shuts no one can open."**

Keys refer to ownership or authority. I have a key to my car and a key to my house. You don't have them because they don't belong to you.

These Christians had been put out of the synagogue. Some of their Jewish families may have even disowned them for their faith in Christ. Jesus was saying that He held the keys to the house of David, He was the one who held the real power over the true Jew. Paul says a true Jew isn't one who by birth was born into Judaism or even one who practices Jewish rituals. A true Jew is one who is born again through Jesus Christ.

Only Christ is the one who has the rightful authority to allow or deny access into the Kingdom. Christ is making reference to the Old Testament passage of

**Isaiah 22** where Eliakim was given these keys that would access all the royal treasuries of the king.

As Jesus uses this passage, He is once again giving assurance of salvation and damnation. It is by His authority alone that a person is granted the privilege of gaining access to heaven. It is by His authority alone that a person is denied the privilege of being allowed in heaven.

For a person who is saved when they die, that door will never be shut from them.

For a person who is not saved when they die, that door will never be opened to them.

Jesus says in **John 10:9** that He is the only door. He has both the power and authority to allow or deny entrance. Let's never forget that we are only one heartbeat away from eternity. **Will the door be open or shut to you?**

Christ identifies Himself as holy and true with the power and authority of heaven. As He looks down on this church in Philadelphia He has some things to say to them.

### **III. AN ILLUSTRIOUS CHURCH – v. 8-10**

Once again we see that nothing misses the eye of the all-seeing Christ who is actively looking in on His church. He sees the fruit of this church. Incidentally, Jesus writes no word of condemnation to this church. It's not that they were a perfect church. There are no perfect churches, but Christ had nothing to condemn them for.

#### **A. Their Position – v. 8a**

They had been given an open door. This could either be an open door of opportunity or an open door to the kingdom. It probably refers to the later, but we can make application to opportunity.

Acts 16 records that Paul and his team had traveled throughout the region of Galatia and Phrygia sharing the gospel. It also says that for some

unknown reason they were kept from going into Asia and Mysia with the gospel. It was then that Paul had his vision of the Macedonian man inviting him to come there with the gospel. The Lord closed some doors to them and opened others.

Perhaps this speaks of the Philadelphian church having an open door to take the gospel further east. As I said earlier, it's believed they took the gospel into India.

**What opportunities of open doors are before us as a church? Are we willing to go through them? What opportunities for local ministry can we pursue?**

There are plenty of areas to venture into and if we are truly following the Lord, His Spirit will show us whether or not we should be going that way.

What we know for sure is that we should be doing something. What we know for sure is that we should be sharing the gospel and helping other believers to grow spiritually. Those are the givens. What we don't know is the where or how.

Linda and Connie started a Bible study at Village Manor a year ago. It was on their heart and Linda has continued that ministry with the assistance of others.

Robyn wants to get some equipment to show Christian movies in the backyard so we can share the gospel with our neighbors.

You might be led some time to have good news clubs for the neighborhood kids.

You might be led to start a ministry to widows in your neighborhood or helping single mom's with car repairs or tutoring at risk kids.

Think about open door opportunities and then be obedient to go. **What are ways you can spread the gospel?**

## **B. Their Persistence – v. 8b**

Jesus notes they had a little strength, but He goes on to say that they had kept His word and not denied His name.

It is in our weakness that we understand His strength. It is in our weakness that we acknowledge that through the strength of Christ we can do tasks before us.

If He brings you to it, He'll bring you through it. It is in our times of anxiety and fear that the Lord asks us to trust Him so that He can give us His strength.

**Isaiah 41:10**

**Isaiah 40** reminds us that when we are tired and weary He is not; when we are without power He increases our power; and when we hope in Him, our strength is renewed. We will run and not grow weary. We will walk and not faint.

**How cool is that? Are you feeling weak today?** He knows about it and will give you His strength.

When they were oppressed they did not give up. When they were persecuted they did not deny Him. They were like Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. When they were faced with denying God or facing the furnace, they chose to face the furnace. Whatever tests came along to this church they stood firm on the word of God and would not deny His name.

**Churches and Christians in San Antonio, Texas are bracing for something similar to what the church in Philadelphia may have faced in their day. Certainly what Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego did - fall in line with the culture or suffer the consequences.**

Here's the article I read this past week:

**The San Antonio City Council, under the leadership of Mayor Julian Castro, is setting the stage for an unprecedented attack on religious liberty, particularly for Christians.**

**In early August, the City Council will consider an ordinance to add "sexual orientation" and "gender identity" to the discrimination ordinances in the city code. The proposal would ban anyone that has ever opposed ("demonstrated bias, by word or deed...") homosexuality from being involved in city**

government and/or performing a city contract/subcontract. The proposed ordinance provides no exemptions for religious beliefs on homosexuality, even beliefs expressed in Church. This makes the likely consequences of this proposed ordinance clear to see: a complete ban of bible-believing Christians and faith-based businesses from participating in the city government.

*“Essentially, it’s a religious test. If I don’t buy into the city’s religious views of life, then I’m not allowed to be a part of the city anymore — business or service.” – Pastor Steve Branson*

Culture is putting more and more pressure on the church to adapt its policies and accept its lifestyle, yet it continues to deny our ability to put our imprint on it. They want us to become like them, but they do not want to become like us.

However, there remains some hope. This last week I received a call from the Hartland Township office. It seems that they want to begin their Bi-weekly Board meetings with an invocation and are inviting area pastors to give the opening prayer. I accepted.

The school district still has meetings throughout the year between the administration and the area clergy. Some still recognize the benefit of a spiritual element that is necessary to maintain morality.

Whatever the Philadelphian church was facing, they had remained persistent in their faith to stand on the Word of God and not deny the name of Christ. Because of that persistence we see their prize.

### C. Their Prize – v. 9

The only direct opposition that Christ names came from the Jews. For a couple of decades Christianity and the church had been seen as a sect of Judaism, they continued to meet in the synagogue, but over time their faith in Jesus as the Messiah ostracized them from their Jewish friends. They were forced out of the synagogue.

Christ told them that someday these false Jews are going to come and acknowledge that the church was right about Christ and be forced to bow before her. They will pay homage to the church because of Christ’s love for the church. Someday our enemies of the cross will be humbled before us.

We may be marginalized for our faith in Christ now, but there is going to come a day when those who slandered us will bow down before us. At that time they’ll understand what we already have come to know and believe about Christ.

There is one more thing that Christ will give them because of their faithfulness.

### D. Their Protection – v. 10

Whatever Jesus saw about what they were going through, He was telling them that it was enough. They had patiently endured the testing put on them and they remained faithful and He didn’t want to put any other burden on them. Jesus said that we would all go through some kind of persecution, but the word trial used here speaks of something that is really intense. Here’s what Jesus says about this trial. It is global in nature. It is an unprecedented intense time of tribulation. It is yet in the future. It is also for a short, determined period of time.

The verse also speaks eschatologically about the church that it will be kept from the great tribulation that will come on the nations in the end times. This will be a worldwide event. Notice the wording. He says **“I will keep you from it.”** That’s means the church won’t go through it. It doesn’t say He will keep us safe in it and neither does it say that He will keep us safe through it as if we would be marooned on some remote island away from the fray, but that He will keep us from it. The churches protection from the great tribulation to come is that it will be removed from it. Taken out. It will happen in the twinkling of an eye, at the sound of the last trumpet

when the voice of the archangel is heard. That is some reward.

Now I want you to notice one more idea that is implied in the verse. We are not to look for tribulation, we are to look for His return.

Finally notice what awaits the church.

#### **IV. AN INHERITED CITIZENSHIP – v. 11-13**

We note first that there is an imminent return.

##### **A. There Is An Imminent Return – v. 11a**

Jesus says **“I am coming soon.”** It does not mean soon in terms of time as if there is a date set, but rather it means quickly. When He comes it will be quick, sudden, He won’t delay or get sidetracked. His return will happen suddenly and imminently.

##### **B. There Is An Important Challenge – v. 11b**

He encourages them to **“hold on to what they have, so that no one will take your crown.”** This does not mean that they will lose their salvation, but rather it speaks of the crown of reward that is given for what we do in service for Christ. Paul tells us that all our works will go through the fire of judgment to determine if they were done in service to the Lord or for our own selfish ends. Only what remains will be what was done for Christ.

Hold on to that. Don’t be like the man who buried his talent and had it taken away and given to another who had been faithful.

##### **C. There Is An Intentional Standing – v. 12a**

Remember that this region was prone to earthquakes. Buildings were easily damaged and left in ruins. Pillars were often the part of the structure that gave the rest of the building stability. When Samson was led into the temple to be made fun of by the Philistines he asked to have his hands

placed on the pillars and with strength from the Lord he moved the pillars causing the temple to cave in. Pillars were a source of main support.

Pillars were synonymous with strength, stability and permanence. That Christ would make them pillars in the Temple of God speaks to their standing, that they would have a permanent place in heaven. The Christian will never be relocated because the structure of God’s foundation isn’t strong enough to support it. The image Jesus gave was a reminder to them that during an earthquake they had to flee for their lives, but in God’s kingdom they won’t ever have to run away or be in fear of being displaced. They were safe. It was an eternal reward, an intentional standing.

There is one final point I want you to notice about this inherited citizenship.

##### **D. There Is An Indelible Name – v. 12b-13**

A name had to do with character. Here It is a personal name.

It is a positional name.

It is a possessional name.

It is personal because we will bear the name of God. Just as man was created in the beginning to bear the image of God, so once again we will bear His image and have His name stamped on us. It speaks of the intimate relationship we now once again have with Him.

A positional name is also mentioned that refers to our citizenship. It is the name of the New Jerusalem. As we noted last week, our name is on its registry. We’re in the book.

Finally, our citizenship is ensured because Christ Himself will write on us His new name. This name is possessional. His is the name that is above every other name. His name represents His fullness – all of what and who He is. It is a reflection of His person and a reminder that we belong to Him. Since the believer has identified with Him, He will

identify with us. These names written on us will show ownership and citizenship.

If you have ever traveled to another country, you are required to have on your person a passport. It is an identification of citizenship. The name of Christ stamped on us is our passport into heaven. It reveals that we are a citizen of heaven, that we rightly belong there.

His name and that place will be eternal and permanent. That's what the believer's in Philadelphia were promised. That is the promise for you and me.

**Will the name of God and the New Jerusalem and Christ be written on you?** If so, hold on, persevere. Look for opportunities of open doors and walk through them. The final exhortation is again repeated: **“If you have an ear listen carefully to what the Spirit is saying to the churches.”** It's a message for everyone of us.