

Revelation

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[0:00] So this morning we're in the book of Revelation, chapter 3. We're going to be taking a look at this letter to the church of Philadelphia.

For the last five weeks, we've been making our way through these seven letters that Jesus commanded the Apostle John to send out in this circuit around the territory of Asia Minor, which is modern-day Turkey, so a little bit northwest of the country of Israel.

And John, of course, we know is on the island of Patmos, not because he likes vacationing, but because of his faithful witness to the word. He's been exiled there.

The testimony he has made about Jesus has not gone over well, and he has been sent away. And yet, his work is not over. In fact, he is to continue bearing witness to the faithful witness, Jesus Christ.

So John has been writing these letters, dictating the words of Jesus to these seven churches. And as we've seen in the last five weeks, it's a mixed bag with these churches.

[1:18] So far, all but one have been rebuked in some way, chastised in some way by Jesus for their lack of faithfulness to him. Some churches are tolerating false teaching, the teaching of the Nicolaitans or the false prophetess Jezebel.

Others are compromising their holiness and befriending the world. Ephesus, the first church we looked at, has lost its first love.

They've been doing all the right things, but there's no love and affection for the risen King Jesus. Smyrna is the only church so far that has been praised by Jesus without any sort of correction.

And Jesus says that they can expect in the near future imprisonment and death as a reward for their faithfulness. Each letter concludes with Jesus' promise to each and every person who overcomes, who remains faithful to him.

And these promises are incredible. Eternal joy in the presence of God, established as his people, possessed by the Lord Jesus, and on and on they go.

[2:37] So all of these letters share this call by Jesus to overcome. And they share the authoritative word of Jesus and his knowledge of the works of these churches.

And all of them come with a promise of some sort of conflict in this life. For those churches being faithful to Jesus, they can expect conflict with the world.

And for those churches who are compromising their loyalty to Jesus, they can expect to be in conflict with him. So today we look at the Church of Philadelphia.

Lucas, thank you, brother, for reading this for us today. Because God's word is what's important, I want to read it to us again, not because of Lucas' poor job, but because the word is sufficient for us. I'd rather you hear it than me. So follow along as I read for us again the letter to the Church of Philadelphia. And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write, the words of the Holy One, the True One, who has the key of David, who opens and no one will shut, who shuts and no one opens.

[4:03] I know your works. I know your works. Behold, I have set before you an open door which no one is able to shut. I know that you have but little power.

And yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name. Behold, I will make those of the synagogue of Satan who say that they are Jews and are not, but lie.

Behold, I will make them come and bow down before your feet and they will learn that I have loved you. Because you have kept the word about my patient endurance, I will keep you from the hour of trial that is coming on the whole world to try those who dwell on the earth.

I am coming soon. Hold fast what you have so that no one may seize your crown. The one who conquers, I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God.

Never shall he go out of it. And 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 from my God out of heaven and my own new name.

[5:23] He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. In this letter, we see Jesus commending the church of Philadelphia for their faithfulness to him.

It is this commendation that leads us to the main point of what Jesus is getting at for us today. Hear this, church.

Jesus is calling us to exalt him in word and in deed until the end.

Jesus is calling us to exalt him, to lift him high, to glorify his name here and now in both our word and in our deeds until the end.

We're going to see this worked out by just walking through this letter like we would any other letter.

[6:29] Any good letter, of course, has a dear so-and-so, I'm writing to you and then sort of the body of the letter with the main content. So we're going to take a look at the introduction found in verse 7 and then we're going to walk through the body of the letter found in verses 8 to 12.

So first the introduction. The recipient of this letter we read in verse 7 is to the angel of the church in Philadelphia. So this is a church in the city of Philadelphia, not Pennsylvania, the one over in the Middle East region.

A city that, by God's grace, has a local body of believers. People have heard of the good news of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ and have forsaken the world and allied themselves with Him.

And it's a church that Jesus loves very much and wants to speak to for their benefit. So a bit of background about this city. A couple things to keep in mind and we'll see them worked out a little bit in how Jesus speaks to this church.

First, there was a, the region was on a fault line and there were earthquakes that regularly unsettled this region of the world. In fact, the last church we looked at, Sardis, in AD 17, there was an earthquake that kind of hit about right on top of that city, but it had this lasting, devastating effect for the people of Philadelphia.

[8:03] Aftershock after aftershock after aftershock, year after year after year to where a lot of the city crumbled. And in fact, the citizens of Philadelphia had to appeal to the Roman Empire for government assistance to come and rebuild their land.

Fortunately for them, Rome agreed to this. In part, probably because of the nickname this city was given. Philadelphia was called the Gateway to the East.

It was a strategic city in the eyes of the Roman Empire that would spread their culture and their philosophy and their way of life deep into the reaches of Asia Minor.

It was a strategic city. So that's who is receiving the letter and that's kind of the city they live in.

And now we turn and see who's writing this letter. In fact, who's speaking this letter that John records. Of course, it's Jesus himself and we see in verse 7 how he describes himself.

[9:12] And as with all of these letters, the way that Jesus describes himself matters to this particular church at this particular time. He picks up on the vision that John sees of him in chapter 1 and he's picking out specific things about that vision to reveal about himself to these individual churches.

Here Jesus leads out the words of the Holy One. This is a term we instantly recognize from the Old Testament to be reserved exclusively for God.

Jesus pulls no punches. He self-identifies as God. He is the Holy One. And he continues, the true one springs to our mind things of faithfulness and reliability that Jesus is claiming to be trustworthy. John calls him the faithful witness in chapter 1, verse 5 and we know that his faithful witness to his father cost him his life. Jesus is telling the truth every single time he opens his mouth.

This Jesus has, we keep reading, the key of David. David. Well we've seen this key language in the vision of chapter 1 where Jesus says in verse 18 I have the keys of death and Hades.

[10:40] And here it's the key of David. Key is always significant speaking of authority. So it says essentially that Jesus says I have the key of David just like I have the key of death and Hades.

I have authority over life and death. I have authority over eternity. And David specifically is speaking of the eternal kingdom of God.

Jesus rules over it as its exclusive king. He says this authority allows him to open doors that no one can shut and shut doors that no one opens.

Jesus holds exclusive rights over matters of life and death. Friend, if you want into the kingdom of heaven Jesus alone grants access.

In fact, he himself is the access into the kingdom of heaven. He shed his blood and died for all who would enter by faith in him.

[11:47] Even this introduction it just continues to speak of his call to us to exalt him to the end. So, we know now who this letter is written to and who is writing the letter, who is speaking the letter.

Now, we turn to the body starting in verse 8 and what's he want this church to know. Look at verse 8. The first words Jesus makes is a claim.

Like every single letter, all seven of them, the first thing he leads in after the introduction is I know your works. It's still true today.

Jesus is still in the midst of all of his churches and he still knows the works of all of his churches.

So, for us, if before God our conscience is clear and we know that we are seeking to be faithful, this brings joy and gratitude and a peace that surpasses understanding.

but if we are compromising in any way, this should bring terror if we understand it, that Jesus still today knows our works. He's not far off.

[12:59] He's not aloof. He hasn't taken a nap. He knows. But his knowledge is not here intended to just keep us in the dark. It's intended for us to come in repentance and bow before him confessing and finding the grace of forgiveness.

He knows our works too, church. And we'll jump over this next sentence in verse 8 for a minute, the behold, to pick back up on how Jesus is going to describe the works of this church.

I know your works and then he picks back up, I know, and he gives three little pieces of knowledge about this church and their works. first, I know that you have but little power, and yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name.

Now this, of course, is not the kind of church that is going to be praised by man's wisdom. They're weak. They don't have much ability. Maybe it's because there weren't very many Christians in Philadelphia.

Maybe it's an intelligence thing or a social status thing, but for whatever reason, this church is weak. And Jesus just moves right past it.

[14:18] He doesn't bring a hammer down. He doesn't say, how dare you, you weaklings. He commends them. He praises them because they've kept his word and not denied his name.

They're being praised for faithfulness to Jesus in spite of their weakness. In fact, it probably even contributed to their being able to praise him and honor him with their lives.

Second Corinthians, Jesus tells Paul, my power is made perfect in weakness. It's not something to be ashamed of. Jesus does not harass them over it.

He commends them for their faithfulness. And notice that it's a specific faithfulness. Right? There's this, you've kept my word and you have not denied my name.

They've been lifting high the name of Jesus. They've been exalting their first love, refusing to compromise or tolerate any sort of outside influences other than the voice and name and person of Jesus, their Lord.

[15:33] There's no hint of false teaching that they are welcoming into their church. Jesus commends them, well done. In saying that they've kept his word, he intends to say that you've been living for me, you're living your life for my namesake.

And you've aligned your life such with my word. You're obeying my word. And that second half of their faithfulness is, you have not denied my name.

They've been identifying verbally and audibly to identifying with Jesus. us. We should not see in this simply avoiding denying him as if, if faced with death or denial, they choose death.

But they're active in this. They're proclaiming Jesus' name because Jesus hasn't mentioned anything about death in our letter, and yet we see in verse 9 that there's opposition.

This is an advancing of Jesus' name, friends, not just avoiding denying it. Though they're being opposed by this group from the synagogue of Satan, though they are exalting Jesus' name and trouble is coming upon them, Jesus praises their faithfulness.

[17:03] And that's pretty much all he says about their works. It's so interesting. There's no correction, there's no criticism, there's no, you're doing pretty good, but if you just add this thing, you'll be really good.

It's just, good job, you're being faithful. That's why in verse 11 he simply just says, hold fast, hold fast, stay the course. Church of Philadelphia was on the right track.

They were doing what they were supposed to be doing, and Jesus praises them for their faithfulness. But obviously we haven't finished the letter, there's much more text in front of us, so what we need to see is that after Jesus says, I know your works, the rest of this letter really brings Jesus to center stage.

And he says, I know your works, and now I want you to know my works. What I've already done, and what I'm about to do, and what I will do at the end. So that's how we're going to proceed through the rest.

We're going to focus on Jesus and his activity that he reveals to this church, and all of it, friends, all of it is meant to encourage and motivate all of God's people to faithfulness to Jesus, to continue exalting him in word and deed with our whole lives until the very end.

[18:31] So first, back in verse 8, that behold that we jumped over earlier, we go back there to see that Jesus has done something for this church that's quite remarkable.

He says, Behold, look, see, I've set before you an open door which no one is able to shut. This immediately should start triggering the introduction, the person of Jesus who has the key of David and opens doors no one can shut, shuts doors no one can open.

remember he's the true one so he's trustworthy at this word and so we need to ask, what's this door? There's some reason to see it as an opportunity for ministry, that Jesus is opening this door for the Philadelphia church, though they're weak, to advance the gospel, to somehow be on mission and to see that their work is rewarded in faithfulness.

The Apostle Paul uses this kind of language at the end of some of his letters to churches saying, please pray for us that God would open a door for the advancement of the gospel.

And Philadelphia after all is the gateway to the east. They're poised to be a gospel headquarters to get this news out throughout Asia Minor, not advancing Greek culture but advancing the good news about Jesus.

[20:02] So I think a little bit of what's going on in this door quite possibly is this opportunity that Jesus has set before the church. We could point to those kind of opportunities in our midst, can't we church?

There are faithful people of our congregations serving children, both our own children and those of our communities. Every Sunday, a couple guys make breakfast, a couple more, preach the word of God to anyone from the community who comes in and wants to be with us.

These are doors that God has opened for us to advance his name in the city. And there are many more, individual after individual after individual, can testify to this reality in our lives because God wants Jesus' name exalted here in Kenosha, in our midst, and everywhere in this city.

He wants this to happen, church. And he's entrusted us with this good news. But there's also, I think, an even more significant piece to this door language that Jesus uses here.

So, setting aside the very real reality that there are doors of opportunity in our midst, let's consider again what he means.

[21:32] In verse 7, Jesus calls himself the true one. And in verse 9, he calls this, the local Jews in the city of Philadelphia, a synagogue of Satan who are, in fact, liars.

the door language is really answering the question, who is it that holds the key to the kingdom of God?

Is it the ethnic Israelites who have received the law of God? Or is it God's son, Jesus Christ? Christ? Imagine this news from Jesus if you were among the Christians in Philadelphia.

You're being harassed, slandered, perhaps even violently persecuted by the local Jews who are zealous for God, but misplaced.

And you hear from Jesus, fellowship with God in his kingdom is mine to give, and I have opened the door to you.

[22:54] That's the door. Entry into the kingdom of heaven where we will fellowship with the risen King Jesus forever. Jesus alone holds the key to that place, and he himself accomplishes the work needed for all of God's people to enter.

God's love. So this open door is referencing the access that the people of God have to his eternal kingdom. Jesus has opened it, and remember, no one will shut it.

Jesus continues from, I want you to know about my past work, to I want you to know about this future work, and he's going to kind of move in stages from near to far, or soon to down the road.

Verse 9, we've already looked at who these people are that are persecuting the church of Philadelphia, but we need to see what Jesus promises will happen, what will come of them.

Notice the repetition of behold, I will make, in verse 9. Second, behold, I will make, we see that I will make them come and bow down before your feet, and they will learn that I have loved you.

[24:21] Isn't that remarkable? The very enemies of God's people in this city will come and bow down at their feet. That's an incredible promise for people facing such opposition.

confession. I imagine that Jesus is particularly excited about these words, not because of the eventual end times triumph of God over all of his enemies, but because of what he's been getting at throughout this letter that I want us to see so clearly.

He might be speaking about the last judgment, when all of God's enemies and God's people will be vindicated, when God's people will be shown to be true and all of God's enemies shown to be false.

Maybe. There's reason to think that Jesus has a much more glorious image on his mind. Jesus is saying that the fruit of faithful witness will be salvation for the enemies of God.

You will see your enemies come to faith, not all of them, but some of them, because you're remaining faithful to the name of Jesus. The reward of the church of Philadelphia's faithfulness to Jesus is new believers from old enemies.

[25:56] Jesus. It's a church not tolerating falsehood. It's a church not befriending the world. And once again, right, once again we see that the foolishness of God triumphs over the wisdom of men at every single turn.

This weak church, this unable church, by their faithfulness, is winning converts to Jesus. It's glorious. Does anybody need that today?

Friends, it is always, always wholehearted, fiery faithfulness to Jesus that bears fruit.

We ought to praise God for the fruit of the faithful witness of our brothers and sisters in Philadelphia. But Jesus isn't done. He's just kind of getting started actually.

He's going to go in verse 10 and share his promise for this church. If you look there, you'll notice this connection. It's because you have kept, I will keep you.

[27:05] Jesus foretells an hour of trial that is coming upon the whole world. And just a quick note that when Revelation uses those who dwell on the earth, thanks Billy, he always is referring to the non-believers.

non-believers. But Jesus here is not focused primarily on the non-believers. He's focused on his promise to the church and he says, because you have kept my word, I will guard you in the hour of trial.

Jesus protects, keeps, guards those who keep his word. period. It's why he says in verse 11, hold fast, that no one may take your crown.

This is a matter of life and death. The victory crowned at the end of this race is eternal life in the presence and glory of God. So hold fast. Christ. And then Jesus moves us way out into the end of all things future in verse 12.

He arrives at the time when future just moves right into eternity. The time when the need of endurance ceases to exist. The time when those who have conquered rest forever.

[28:40] And it's because Jesus has conquered and there remain no enemies for him to defeat. There's two elements to the promise to the one who conquers in verse 12.

A permanent residence in God's house and being possessed by Jesus forever. forever. This would be particularly sweet news for a city being pummeled by earthquakes.

This infrastructure is shaken. Requiring frequent evacuation of the very city that they call home for safety reasons.

And Jesus says, I will make the one who overcomes a pillar in the temple of my God. Pillars do not move.

They're unshakable. And never shall he go out of it again. It's permanent. A permanent fixture, permanent place of prominence in the unshakable house of God for the one who overcomes.

[29:57] And for a church likely having been shut out of the city synagogues and shut out of family and friends who've disowned them, Jesus says, you'll be mine forever.

You belong to me. The ultimate end for all those who exalt Jesus now will be everlasting joy then. Named by the Lord Jesus and possessed by him. I hope you're seeing that throughout this letter, Jesus is calling us, Christ the King Church in Kenosha, Wisconsin in 2018, Jesus is calling us to exalt him in word and in deed until the end.

to lift his name high, to speak with affection for him, to do good to others.

So how do we do this? In the last, in the remaining time, I want to try and answer this question for us. How do we do this? The simple answer is we open our mouths and we live for him.

[31:19] We speak with joy about the testimonies of God's grace that he has gifted to us in Christ.

We share with others that Jesus is the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords. That he shed his blood for sinners like us. That he is risen and radiant and reigning now and forever.

forever. And we live for him. We follow his example. We show compassion to our neighbors. We seek the well-being and the interest of others.

Those in life groups studying 1 Peter, you'll recognize this one. We don't repay evil for evil or reviling for reviling. But on the contrary, we bless.

For to this we've been called. It's clear, right? It's simple. But it's nowhere near easy.

[32:28] Jesus is so clear what he's calling us to. And yet this is really hard work, church, isn't it? We know this. And there are many ways that we can talk ourselves out of this and that we can shrink back from this.

And our text gives us three traps that we must avoid. Three traps that we must avoid. There's one in verse 8, one in verse 9, and one in verse 10.

When Jesus says in verse 8, I know your works, you have but little power. There's a trap that we all face of focusing on our own abilities or lack thereof.

The risen Jesus identifies this in the church of Philadelphia that you don't have much strength and yet what does he say?

He's not bothered by it. Because the salvation of sinners is not in human ability. It requires someone to open a door that is beyond us and our human abilities.

[33:37] So we must not fall into the trap of focusing on ourselves as we seek to exalt Jesus in word and deed until the end. We won't get very far if we fall into that trap.

Second trap from verse 9 is the trap of focusing on our current opposition. opposition. There were Jewish citizens in Philadelphia that were opposing the church of God.

And it's easy to shrink back in the midst of opposition. We know this. The devil who prowls around like a roaring lion loves to knock the church of Jesus off course.

He's well equipped. He's seeking to harm and unsettle God's people at every turn. He wants the opposition that we face here in Kenosha and wherever our relationships are found.

He wants that opposition to silence us. Or to get us on the defensive. Shrinking back from faithfulness to Jesus. He wants to quiet our witness and perhaps produce compromise and blending in with the world that's against our Lord.

[35:05] There are many enemies. Many who oppose the kingdom of God and his righteousness. But we must not focus on the opposition.

opposition. It's a trap that will be our undoing. There's one more trap from verse 10 and it's the trap of focusing out into the future.

The worry about what's ahead. The opposition that maybe we aren't facing right now but you can see the storm clouds kind of gathering and moving in on the horizon.

Jesus knows about that too, doesn't he? Verse 10, we see that there's an hour of trial that's coming upon the whole world. We cannot let future trials, concerns about what might be, become a trap to us.

We all know about how it is, right, to fear the immediate fallout from opening our mouth to share Jesus with somebody.

[36:16] We can go, oh, I just read something from the Psalms this morning that's so relevant to what this person is sharing and I just, God, help me remember it so I can share it with my non-believing co-worker.

And then it's like this default switch that just flips in us, isn't it? It's like, but if you do that, what will they say? How will they respond to that?

How will that go over with your boss and your employers and your other friends in the office? And now you're risking so much here. It's this immediate future we can get scared off by but we also, if we look out beyond, I mean, what is to come of us in the next five or ten or fifteen years?

Does any of us really know? Maybe things will start looking up, but it might be just as reasonable to expect things are getting worse.

And if we focus out there on the potential dangers that await us, we've been snared yet again.

Jesus helps us, friends, in this text see where our focus must be, on Him.

[37:29] He opens doors that no one can shut. He grants salvation to enemies like you and me and wants to grant it to more and more and more.

He uses the faithful church to glorify and exalt His name. He always has and He always will. Our eyes must be on Him if we are to exalt Him.

We cannot focus on the traps of inability or circumstances, present or future, because they will always throw us off course. So let us fix our eyes on Jesus, today and always.

Brothers and sisters serving in King's place, you fix your eyes on Jesus. You stand fast. Stay the course. Breakfast team, same.

Stay the course. Exalt Jesus. For all of us, Mike has invited us to pray for 10 new believers this year, that before the end of our ministry year in June, we would have 10 new people in this room with arms raised, praising God.

[38:58] If we don't bear witness to Jesus, how will that happen? Teachers, you who are in what seems like hopeless situations, do not focus on the circumstances.

Fix your eyes on Jesus and press on. Press on. Friends, there's one last thing I want to share with us.

It's found in verse 10. I've been really excited about this all week. It's both convicting and so encouraging.

John calls Jesus the faithful witness back in chapter 1. And this text is telling us today, our text from Philadelphia, that we need to let Jesus lead us.

We need to let Jesus define faithfulness for us. If you look at verse 10, this phrase, my word about patient endurance.

[40:14] See that phrase there? If you're one that marks up your Bible, I'd invite you to circle the my and draw an arrow in front of the word patient endurance.

The my that Jesus is talking about here is not you've kept my word. The my that Jesus is speaking about here is about his own patient endurance.

Church of Philadelphia, Jesus says, you have kept the word about my endurance. That's how it should read.

Because you have kept the word about my patient endurance. And in that, we see the example of our king, don't we? His patient endurance defines how we understand our own patient endurance.

endurance. Jesus' patient endurance, perhaps, we're, we realize this is unfortunate because it's scary as we start talking about what he's getting at, but he was not patiently enduring like somebody who prepares to board up their house because the hurricane's coming.

[41:42] no one would think that about Jesus when we read of his life. This is not an endurance that says, well, let's hunker down, just kind of ride out the storm.

Jesus' patient endurance was a day after day after day proclaiming of the kingdom of God. See, the Philadelphian church keeping the word about his faithful endurance is keeping the gospel of a suffering crucified Messiah.

You can't keep that to yourself and be faithfully enduring in light of this passage. We can't. The faithful endurance of Jesus is a see, we're going up to Jerusalem kind of patient endurance. We know what happened there. Jesus says, the Son of Man will be handed over, betrayed into the hands of men, mocked and flogged and crucified. And then three days later, he will be raised. His patient endurance was a life of opposition from the world. From the synagogue of Satan on a large scale.

[43:10] It's no wonder, right, church, that he says to his people over and over again things like, do not be surprised if the world hates you, hated me first, or a servant is not above his master.

If they persecute you, it's only because they've persecuted me. It's why the Apostle Paul understands suffering so clearly and can say, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted because Jesus' patient endurance was to the cross.

Friends, we endure patiently the opposition of the world by exalting Jesus in spite of inability, opposition, whether it's current or future.

not by boarding things up and hunkering down for the storm. This is not a passive patient endurance. This is an advancing of the kingdom patient endurance met with opposition at every side.

Jesus leaves us an example and then says, if anyone would come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me. That's our example, church.

[44:39] The faithful, patient endurance of our crucified king. And just so we're clear, his example is also our salvation.

salvation. Jesus patiently endured the cross, despising its shame so that he might win sons and daughters for his father. The innocent dying for the guilty so that the guilty may go free and find the open door into the kingdom of heaven forever for them.

Sinners deserving of wrath, welcomed into the household of God, established as pillars forever, conquerors, not because of our merit, but because of Christ and his grace forever.

He is the author and perfecter of our faith. So church, let us exalt him in word and deed until the very, very end.

let the one who has an ear hear what the spirit says to the churches. Amen.