

Hold On!

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- [0 : 00] Actually, let's pray now. Heavenly Father, thank you again for your word, and we do pray that you would help us to understand it, to be encouraged by it, and to live in light of it.
- We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, please, if you haven't already, turn your Bibles back to Revelation 3, page 1-2-3-8, page 1-2-3-8 in the Black Pew Bible.
- This is our second last church in the seven churches. But we've been going for almost eight or nine weeks, and so we're going to take a break, and we'll come back to the really fun stuff, the weird and wonderful stuff, next year.
- I think about the time I'm on long service leave, and Ricky's here. No, no, no, I'm just joking. I don't know if you like rollercoaster rides, but I do know if you're on a scary rollercoaster ride, you hold on, or at least I do.
- I don't love them. Although perhaps you hold on not with as much screaming as this journalist from the Today Show who did a story on a new rollercoaster in Dreamworld in Queensland.
- [1 : 05] This was a few years ago when the buzzsaw opened. Have a look. You ready to do that? Let's not talk about it. I think we should just do it. Do it? Okay. Very excited about this. Can you hit it up? You're right?
- Yeah. Okay, you feel good about this? Now, apparently the trick is to keep our head back. Yeah. Hang on, I'm going to have to hold on. You hold on too. Oh, hang on a second.
- Oh. No. No. Oh. Oh. Oh. It does feel good. It's good for the axe. Ah.
- Ah. Ah. Ah. Ah. Ah. Ah. Ah. Ah. Ah. Ah. Ah. Ah. Ah.
- Ah. Ah. Ah. Ah. Ah. Ah. Ah. Ah. Ah. Ah.
- [2 : 15] Ah. Ah. Ah. Ah. Ah. Ah. But apart from the screaming and the coughing, I think this guy actually had the right idea. You hold on. Like he said at the start, I'm going to hold on and you hold on too.
- And that's the command, the one command that's particular to this church. There's another command, which is verse 13, but it's the same for every church. Hear what the Spirit says to all the churches.
- The command here is in the rollercoaster ride of the Christian life, hold on to Christ and his word. And that's what we'll see today. Because the church like Smyrna in Philadelphia, they were suffering too.
- And so it seems they are weary. Because that's often what suffering does to us. It makes us tired, doesn't it? Exhausts us, makes us weary. Or in the words of verse 8, it leaves us with little strength.
- And so Jesus begins with some encouragement for the weary. Point 1, verse 7. This will be our longest point because he gives quite a lot of encouragement.
- [3 : 20] So have a look there in verse 7. He says, To the angel of the church in Philadelphia write, 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. Now this Philadelphia here is not the cheesesteak city in the US, the city of Philly. It's the ancient city in Turkey today.

And it's actually called today Al-Ashir. It was located, and this Matt looked a lot better on my computer screen than it does on your screen, so I'm sorry about that. But it was located in between Sardis, which we looked at last week, and Laodicea, which we're looking at next week.

Just smack bang in the middle of that purple Asia Minor area. And it was, we think, the historians think, it was originally built by the king of Pergamon for his brother, which is why it was called Philadelphia.

Many of you might know, Philadelphia means brotherly love. But it was also a gateway city to those eastern regions, those regions on the right. Like Phrygia, which is the place right to the edge of the pink part of the map, and then into Galatia, which looks like it's in the sea, because it's the same colour, I don't know why they did that.

[4 : 33] And then down to Pamphylia in the green, and so on. All those eastern regions. Initially to kind of spread the Greek culture when it was first built, it was kind of an outpost for the Greek culture, and they were trying to send it out further.

But by the time of the Roman Empire, when Revelation was written, it was kind of a gateway for the postal service. The Roman post would come from Rome, it would stop at Philadelphia, like a kind of sorting station, and out it'd go to the eastern regions.

And this doorway function earned it the title, Gateway to the East. And perhaps this is why Jesus chooses to describe himself the way he does here in verse 7, as the one who opens and closes doors.

He is the one who is actually in control of this doorway city. But more than that, he's actually the one who opens or closes doors to the throne room of God in heaven.

Verse 7 is actually a quote from our first reading, from Isaiah 22, that Vera brought us. It begins with a word to Shebna, who is like the palace steward or administrator.

[5 : 41] And God has a go at him because all Shebna cares about is building up a healthy nest egg for himself. And so God then goes on to say, as we heard in our reading, that he will clothe someone else, Eliakim, with your, with Shebna's robe and sash, and give Eliakim Shebna's authority as the steward, as the palace administrator.

And then he goes on to say, I will place on Eliakim's shoulder the key to the house of David. What he opens, no one can shut. And what he shuts, no one can open.

That's quoted exactly here in Revelation verse 7, isn't it? And so here in Revelation, Jesus is saying, he is now the one who holds the key of David.

He is the one who can open or close doors to the palace, to the ultimate king. And not Hezekiah, who was king back in Shebna and Eliakim's day, but to the ultimate king, God.

And in fact, that's what we see in the start of the very next chapter. In chapter 4, verse 1, you can look in your Bibles or on the screen. Notice John looks and there before him was a door standing open in heaven.

[6 : 55] And the rest of chapter 4 describes the throne room of God. And so Jesus is again saying that he is the one who can open the door to heaven to God, in other words.

Ever locked your keys in the car? Has anyone ever done that? You're not going to admit to it, okay. Locked yourself out of the house, perhaps? Yep, a few people have done that, yeah. Keys are quite handy, aren't they?

You can't get through locked doors unless you've got a key, usually, unless you get someone to break in for you or unless someone leaves the window open. I was in here on Wednesday last week and I walked into this room and I saw someone I didn't expect who was in here.

I said, oh, what are you doing in here? And he said, oh, the window was open, so I climbed through. Now, for the record, he was supposed to be here. He just forgot his key. He was doing some work for us on the sound system.

Though I am going to talk to the staff about locking the window. But you see, unless the window is open or you get a locksmith, you need a key to get in, don't you? And Jesus is saying he holds the key, the key of David, that gives access to the king, God in the throne of heaven.

[8 : 08] It's like that famous verse where Jesus says, I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father, do you remember? Father, except through me, because he has the key.

And so verse eight, he goes on to say, I know your deeds, Philadelphia. See, I have placed before you an open door that no one can shut. I know that you have little strength, yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name.

You see, since Jesus holds the key of David, then he is able to place a door that is locked open, as it were, open before them, a door that no one can shut on them.

This here is the guarantee of entry into heaven, I think. Why? Well, because he knows their deeds, that despite having little strength, they have kept Christ's word and not denied Christ's name, it says.

In other words, they've kept trusting in Jesus, kept believing in his word. And this is what we're all to do. Every single person in this room, whether you are a Christian or not a Christian, we're to do the same thing.

[9 : 23] If you are not a Christian, we are to start trusting in Christ, believing his word. And if we are Christians, we're to keep trusting in Christ and believing his word.

In a city full of pressure to worship false gods, which is the same for us here in Melbourne, or for Philadelphia, persecution from the Jewish synagogue, despite their little strength, despite their weariness or small numbers, they have kept his word and not denied his name.

Wouldn't that be a great reputation to have? A great thing to be known for? I wonder, I'm pretty sure, but do you know who this person's known for? It's Roger Federer. What's he known for?

Tennis, yep, it's pretty straightforward. What is this group of people known for? Music, yep. I wonder what we here at HCD are known for. It's a question worth asking ourselves, isn't it?

Are we known as people who keep trusting in Christ, who have kept his word and not denied his name? A great reputation to have. It was the case for Philadelphia and because they have kept trusting in Christ, then he has set before them an open door to heaven, to God, which for them was like a bright light at the end of this dark tunnel, encouraging the hold on.

[10 : 46] A bit like this day today. How beautiful is it outside? And yesterday was really nice. It was actually almost warm. It was our light at the end of the winter tunnel, wasn't it? To keep going. Well, so too here.

But Jesus gives even more encouragement. Verse 9. He says, I will make those who are of the synagogue of Satan, who claim to be Jews, though they are not, but are liars, I will make them come and fall down at your feet and acknowledge or know that I have loved you.

Here it seems, some Jews claim to be God's true people and not those Christians, but Jesus calls them a synagogue of Satan. Why? Well, because Satan is the father of lies.

And what are they doing here? Well, he calls them liars. So that's who they belong to. They have rejected Jesus. They say he's not the true Messiah or the true king.

The true king was still to come, they said. That's a lie. Jesus is the true king. And perhaps they also lied to the Christians, saying, you can't really be loved by God.

[11 : 55] You're not his true people. Or perhaps, you can't really be loved by this Jesus. Look at how you're suffering. Either way, these Jews persecuted these Christians. And because Jesus then promises to vindicate the Christians, doesn't he?

He says, I'll turn the tables. I will make those Jews fall down to you at your feet this time instead of persecuting you. And I'll make them acknowledge or know that I have loved you.

The word for fall down here is used elsewhere to bow down in worship, actually. And so this is a picture of the last day where we will appear before Christ and his judgment throne and then we will judge the world with Christ.

That's when non-Christians will fall down at our feet. In fact, I don't know if you realise this. Paul says in 1 Corinthians, do you not know that the Lord's people will judge the world? I don't know if you knew that.

But we will with Christ. And on that day, those who have persecuted us will fall at our feet and know that we were right. That we were right to believe.

[13 : 03] That we were right to say we are loved by Christ. Even if at times we looked abandoned by Christ. At one of my Bible study groups last week, we were lamenting the persecution of Christians at the moment in the state of Manipur in India.

More than 100 churches, I think since May this year, have been burned. I think it's up to 114, the last count I could see. Burnt by Hindu extremists. And Christians have been killed, raped and tortured.

Last week, I think it was the 19th of July, a video went viral. I didn't watch it. I didn't want to watch it because it's of two women being paraded naked through the streets after being sexually assaulted.

It's horrific, isn't it? Now the Indian Prime Minister claims he will hold the guilty responsible. Yet other sources say that he's actually turned off the internet.

We have someone from church who has relatives over there and said, oh, he's turned off the internet so no more news can get out because secretly he wants to get rid of Christians and make it a completely Hindu country. I don't know which is true but I'm just telling you what I've heard.

[14 : 09] Either way, these Christians in Manipur could very much feel like Jesus doesn't love them. Couldn't they? Or closer to home, I remember one of our members here at HTD having very poor health.

She couldn't walk. She was bound to a chair and her non-Christian adult children would kind of mock her faith. You know, if God really loves you, why are you suffering like this?

Well, stop believing in him. But Jesus says, I will vindicate you. I will show that you were right. From the last day, I will make those who mock you fall before you and they will know that I have loved you even despite appearances.

And this promise of vindication would have given them great motivation to keep holding on. Knowing that Christ will put all things right.

That he will bring justice. He will hold those persecutors accountable. And what's more, he will also keep us until the day he does. Verse 10. Since you have kept my command to endure patiently, I will also keep you from the hour of trial that is going to come on the whole world to test the inhabitants of the earth.

[15 : 20] Now, this verse is a bit tricky to work out. I've been struggling with it and lots of commentators are struggling with it. We're told that this hour will come to test the inhabitants of the earth, which in Revelation always refers to non-Christians.

So, it's going to test them somehow. But we're also told this hour of trial will come on the whole earth. And so, that includes us Christians as well. We're going to get caught up in it somehow.

And so, it could be the last day, the judgment day. But in Revelation, what we see is the judgment that's happening now where God allows disasters and wars to come on this world, this fallen world because of sin.

But he uses them to test people to see if non-Christians will turn to him or perhaps whether they'll harden their hearts against him. And so, the idea of being kept from this hour is really the idea being kept from the spiritual harm of this hour.

We might be caught up in the physical harm of the hour, natural disasters and wars and the like, but he'll keep us from the spiritual harm of this hour. In fact, he'll even grow our faith through this hour.

[16 : 33] And it's why a Christian and a non-Christian can go through the same suffering and have different responses. Have you seen that? You know, the non-Christian hardens their heart against God more saying, well, I can't believe in a God who allows suffering.

But the Christian will say, actually, I know God, well, he knows suffering himself in Christ. Christ suffered greatly for us and he did that to open a way to a world to come where there'll be no more suffering.

And I know that he sees the bigger picture and so, I'm going to keep trusting him more even though I don't know why. Because I know he's good, he gave his son and he knows why. I've seen this happen, that lady I mentioned before whose kids mocked her faith.

She was caught up with the trial of physical suffering but through it she actually grew in faith. How is that possible? Because God kept her from the spiritual harm of that hour and even grew her faith through that hour as it were.

While most of her non-Christian kids hardened their hearts although one softened them, softened his heart towards God. The point is God will keep us from the spiritual harm of this hour which is really the time between Jesus' first coming and second coming.

[17 : 46] It's a long hour. Of course, this hour can seem like not just long but forever especially when we are caught up with some sort of suffering ourselves and so, Jesus gives further encouragement in verse 11 saying, first four words, I am coming soon.

Now, I realise soon, does it feel like soon, does it? I mean, you said this 2,000 years ago so it doesn't feel like soon but we need to remember that we think in terms of lifespans, God thinks in terms of an eternal span.

It's a little bit different, isn't it? It's like when you were kids, times seem to go really slow, Christmas seems to take forever to come around every year but as you get older, time flies, doesn't it?

my second child is about to finish school forever, I can't believe I'm this old, I can't be that old. Or when you take kids or nieces and nephews, grandkids or whatever, on a car trip, what's the question they ask when you're just out of the driveway?

Are we there yet? You've got it. And you're thinking, we've just started, this is going to be a long drive. Different perspective, it's the same idea with God but soon does mean it's the very next big thing on God's to-do list.

[19 : 06] Here is God's to-do list, create the world, tick, call ethnic Israel, tick, send son to save, tick, grow true Israel, what's in progress, so it's kind of half a tick, and the next thing on his big to-do list, send son to judge and reward.

Soon means it's the next big thing and he won't delay one second longer than planned. Jesus is not catching Jetstar, there'll be no cancelled flights.

See, I have set an open door before you, I will vindicate you, I will keep you from spiritual harm and I am coming soon.

In light of those four encouragements then point to hold on. Do you see the rest of verse 11? He says, hold on to what you have so that no one will take your crown.

as I said, this is the only command particular to this church. As I said, verse 13 is a command, but that's the same for every church to listen or to hear. What are they to hold on to?

[20 : 10] Well, what they have already been keeping. Back in verse 8, they've been keeping Christ's word and not denying his name. They've been keeping his name, in other words, keeping him. So they keep holding on to Christ and his word so that no one will take their crown.

Their crown earlier on was in chapter 2 verse 10 is described as the crown of life. But if they let go of Christ, then they lose life eternal.

In 1932, the US Navy launched a massive helium-filled airship to carry planes on. Actually, I didn't know this until recently. It was the world's first purpose-built flying aircraft carrier.

But on the 11th of May 1932, while it was at Camp Kearney in California for refuelling, tragedy struck. The sailors, that's the airship there, and we came into Camp Kearney, the sailors, which is that kind of clump, that black clump in the middle, that's a whole group of sailors, trying to hold on to the guy ropes to pull it in place and tie it down so they can refuel it.

But they couldn't hold on and the airship floated up and most of the sailors let go except for three. Now sadly, two of them couldn't keep holding on and so they let go and lost their life.

[21 : 33] One guy though did keep holding on and after two hours at 2,000 feet was slowly pulled up into the airship. Here he is, 19-year-old Bud Coet.

said, when interviewed he expressed sadness for the loss of his mates but he also said being safe in that airship and I quote was a grand and glorious feeling.

I bet. I bet it was. We're to hold on to Christ like Bud held on to that rope. That Christ may bring us up to life eternal in the worlds to come which will be a grand and glorious feeling.

Of course sometimes it's hard to hold on, isn't it? Especially when we're suffering and weary from it but because it's a matter of eternal life and death Jesus gives even more encouragement.

Point 3 verse 12. Two more bits. He says, the one who is victorious I will make a pillar in the temple of my God.

[22 : 40] Never again will they leave it. To the one who is victorious that is to the one who holds on to Christ Christ will firstly make them a pillar in the temple or the house of God.

This is a symbol of permanence. You've heard of the expression they're now part of the furniture. Have you heard of that expression? It means they're always there, they'll never leave, that kind of thing, and that's the idea here, part of the structure.

In fact, the next sentence there where it says never will they leave it again makes it clear that this is an image of permanence. People often had to leave their homes in Philadelphia because it was prone to earthquakes.

In fact, they had some huts, temporary huts built outside the city limits because they'd go there so regularly. It wasn't quite a holiday house, but it was something like that. But here, Jesus promises they'll never have to leave God's house.

And to understand how good this is, we need to remember how brilliant God's house will be. I like the psalmist who sang how lovely is your dwelling place, the temple.

[23 : 49] He says, my soul yearns even faints for the courts, the temple courts of the Lord. Better is one day in your courts than a thousand elsewhere, he says. How good must God's house have is better than a thousand in Fiji, Bora Bora, escape to the country, I don't know, whatever you think is the best place on earth to live.

This psalmist says, God's house is so good that one day there is better than a thousand anywhere else. In fact, he says, his soul yearns, faints to be there.

That's how good God's house is. And Jesus says, to the house to be God's house.

I will write on them the name of my God and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which is coming down out of heaven from my God. And I will also write on them my new name.

Here they're given some new names, which again would have carried special significance for Philadelphia because it changed its name several times after different emperors and even today is now Alashahir.

[25 : 05] Only here they're given the names of God, the new Jerusalem and Jesus own new name. When you put your name on something it shows that it belongs to you, doesn't it? It's why kids put their names on their jumpers and books and pencil cases and the like to show that it belongs to them.

Jesus will write the name of there as its citizens.

That's our true home. And Jesus will write his new name on us to show that we belong to him. Why is it new? Well it's new not in terms of being different but in terms of having a different status.

He's still Jesus but after his resurrection he was publicly declared to be Jesus the Lord. In fact he was already Lord before but by his resurrection he's publicly declared to be Lord.

Before on earth he was Jesus the God man but now he's Jesus the God man glorified in heaven. It's a different status that the name is representing.

[26 : 15] And so writing this new name on us shows that we belong to Jesus as his new glorified nearly glorified brothers and sisters on that day. That's what we kind of get hints at from Isaiah that they'll see our glory and we'll be called by a new name.

You see at the moment down here is earthly Ricky. Earthly Ricky is a pretty cool guy. Got to know him over the last seven months. He's a pretty cool guy. I think you'd agree.

But on that last day when Jesus writes his new name on Ricky it won't be earthly Ricky it'll be glorified Ricky. he'll be even cooler. That's the idea. Only cooler is a bit kind of weak.

And so here's the encouragement to hold on. An open door to heaven vindication over those who mock us being kept from spiritual harm Jesus is coming soon.

He'll make us a permanent pillar in God's house and he'll give us the name of God the new Jerusalem and his own new glorified name. Now keep us we pray to remember all this encouragement that we've heard today that we might keep holding on to Christ and his word.

[28 : 05] We ask in his name. Amen.