

Hold On!

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[0 : 00] As you are seated, please grab your pew Bibles if you haven't already and turn back to our second reading from Revelation chapter 3 as we come to our second last letter to the churches.

We will continue through the book of Revelation next year because we've been doing it for a number of weeks so far, so we're not going to skip the fun parts, but we'll come back to it next year. I don't know if you like roller coaster rides or not, but I do know that when you're on a scary one, you hold on. Though perhaps not with as much screaming as one journalist who was working for the Today show and they went up and did a segment at Dreamworld, this was a few years ago, with a new roller coaster called the Buzzsaw that they were opening.

Take a look. You ready for 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? Yep. Okay. I feel good about this. Now apparently the trick is to keep our head back.

Yep. So this is the wrong model. Hang on, I'm going to have to hold on. You hold on too. Oh, hang on a second. Oh, no! No! Oh, excellent!

[1 : 23] Oh! Excellent! It's a little more chin actually. Does feel good. Good for the end! Ah! Ah! Ah! Stop!

Ah! Ah! Stop! Ah!

No! I think his host covers her face in embarrassment.

Certainly the behind the people are cracking up. But to be fair, I think I would be the same. But anyway, not a big holocaust of fun. But did you, apart from the screaming, he did have the right idea at the start, didn't he?

Yeah, hold on. I'm going to have to hold on and you hold on too. And that's the command, the main command for the church at Philadelphia today. In fact, there's only one command apart from the last one in verse 13 to hear what the Spirit says, which is the same for all of them.

[2 : 32] And that one command is in the rollercoaster ride of the Christian life, hold on to Christ. You see, the church of Philadelphia, like Smyrna, was suffering.

And so it seems as though it's weary because that's what suffering does to us, doesn't it? It makes us tired and weary. Or as verse 8 puts it, it leaves us with little strength.

And so Jesus begins with some encouragement for the weary, point one. There's lots here. So this will be our longest point, starting 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, of course, is not the cheese steak city of the US that Philly is.

[3 : 33] It's the ancient city of Turkey, today called Al-Shahir. It was located down the road. I thought this was going to turn out better than it does. Sorry about that.

But hopefully, I don't know if you can see in the yellow, but Philadelphia is in between Sardis, what we looked at last week, and Laodicea, which we'll look at next week. And it was probably built by the king of Pergamon, which was a church we looked at a few weeks ago.

The king probably built it for his brother, which is why it's called Philadelphia, because as you might know, the word Philadelphia means brotherly love. But it was also a gateway city to those eastern regions, initially to spread the Greek culture, and then later on, it was like a place to send Roman mail from.

So mail from Rome would come, and it would stop at Philadelphia. It was like a postal sorting station, and then it would go out to the eastern regions, like Phrygia, which is the name at the right-hand side of the pink, and then into Galatia, which is the same color as the sea.

I don't know why they did that. And then down to Pamphylia, Lycia, and so on. And this doorway function of Philadelphia earned the title gateway or doorway to the east.

[4 : 52] And perhaps this is why Jesus chooses to describe himself, in verse 7, as one who opens and closes doors, because he is actually the one in control of this doorway city.

But more than that, I think, he is the one who opens or closes doors to God, because verse 7 is actually a quote from our first reading, our Old Testament reading, where Shebna was the royal steward or administrator.

And he was the one who had the key of David. In other words, he was the one who could let people in to see the king of Judah, or could shut the door and keep people out from the king of Judah, who at that time was Hezekiah.

But Shebna only cared about himself, and building up, amassing a big retirement plan, including a big funeral plan, it said in the text.

And so God goes on to say in our first reading, that he'll instead clothe another person, Eliakim, with your, with Shebna's robe, and fasten your sash around him.

[5 : 59] Give him the authority of the palace administrator. Give him the key to the house of David. And notice this is quoted in our passage today, what he opens, no one can shut, and what he shuts, no one can open.

And so here in Revelation, Jesus seems to be saying he is now the fulfillment of that. He is the one who holds the key of David. He is the one who can open or close the door to the ultimate king, who is God.

And in fact, if you just look at chapter 4, verse 1, and your Bibles are on the screen, what do we see in the very next chapter? A door standing open in heaven.

And it goes on to talk about the throne of God. Ever locked your keys in your car? I have. Or locked yourself out of your house accidentally?

You can do it. You can get in if you get help to break in or if there's an open window and the like. I walked into church last Wednesday and I found someone in here that I wasn't expecting to see.

[7 : 12] And they said, oh, yeah, the window was unlocked. So I got in through the window. Now, that's okay. They were supposed to be there. We'd actually got him to fix some sound issues, but he just forgot his key.

Though we were talking to the staff about locking that window. But generally, you need a key to get in, don't you? And Christ alone has the key of David.

And so Christ alone can open the door to heaven, to God. As he famously says, I'm the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

Yeah, because he has the key. And so, verse 8, he says, I know your deeds. See, I have placed before you an open door, Philadelphia, that no one can shut.

I know that you have little strength, yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name.

Since Jesus holds the key of David, he says he's placed an open door before them, a door that no one can shut.

[8 : 18] Here, I think, is the guarantee of entry into heaven. That seems to be the Old Testament background and where it goes in Revelation chapter 4.

Why has he given them this guarantee? Well, because he knows their deeds, that despite having little strength, despite being weary or small in number, they have kept Christ's word and not denied Christ's name.

That is, they've kept trusting in Jesus, kept believing in his word. And this is what we're all to do in this room and online, whether you are a Christian or not.

If you are not a Christian, then you need to start trusting in Jesus and his word. And if we are a Christian, we're to keep trusting in Jesus and his word, aren't we?

In a city full of pressures to worship false gods and persecution from the Jewish synagogue here, despite their weariness, they've kept his word and not denied his name.

[9 : 29] Isn't that a great reputation to have? Isn't it a great thing to be known for? I wonder if you know what this person is known for in the middle. It's Roger Federer, everyone.

What's he known for? Dennis. Yeah, that's right. And what are these people known for? Music.

Yeah, that's right. But I wonder, what are we known for here?

Are we known as people who are committed to Christ's word and won't deny his name?

Philadelphia was. And because they kept trusting in Christ, then set before them is a door, an open

door that no one can shut on them.

A door to heaven, which for them would have been like a bright light at the end of a dark tunnel. In other words, it would have motivated them to keep going. And so also verse nine, he goes on to give more motivation or encouragement.

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 that I have loved you.

[10:42] Here it seems that some Jews claim to be God's true people, not those Christians. But Jesus calls them a synagogue of Satan. Why?

Well, because Satan was the father of lies. And what are these Jews? Liars. They're lying by saying Jesus is not the promised Messiah, the promised king.

And perhaps they're also lying by saying that God doesn't really love you, Christians, and that Jesus can't possibly love you if you're suffering like this. Either way, these Jews persecuted these Christians because Jesus then promises to vindicate the Christians, Christians, to turn the tables. He says, I will make those Jews fall down at your feet and know, despite their lies, that I have loved you. The word for fall down here in verse 9 is the same word used elsewhere, to bow down in worship.

And so when will they bow down in worship of people? Well, you shouldn't really worship people, should you? Well, it's going to be on the last day when Christians judge the world with Christ.

[11:57] After we appear before Christ's judgment seat, we will judge the world. I don't know if you know that. In fact, Paul says that in 1 Corinthians, do you not know that the Lord's people will judge the world? And those who have persecuted us will fall at our feet and know we were right.

We were loved by Christ, even when at times we looked abandoned by Christ. At Bible study group last week, we were lamenting the persecution that's happening at the moment in the state of Manipur in India.

More than 100 churches, I think it's up to 114, have been burnt by Hindu extremists. Christians have been killed, raped and tortured. And a video last week, I think it was on the 19th, someone told me, went viral, a video of two women being paraded naked through the streets after being sexually assaulted.

It is horrific. The Indian Prime Minister claims that he will hold the guilty responsible. But I know someone from our church who has relatives over in India and they tell me that he's deliberately turned off the internet so news can't get out from that state because he actually wants Christians gone.

Either way, I don't know which is true, either way, these Christians could very much feel like that Jesus doesn't love them, couldn't they? Or closer to home, I remember one of our members here had very poor health and was bed bound, couldn't walk, and her non-Christian adult children would actually mock her faith.

[13:37] If God really loved you, mum, why are you suffering like this? Don't believe in him. But Jesus says, I will vindicate you. I will show that you were right to trust in him.

From the last day, he will make those who mock you fall before you when you judge the world with Christ. And they will then know, I have loved you.

And this promise of vindication would have been great motivation for the Philadelphian church to hold on, to keep holding on to Christ, knowing that Christ will put all things right.

And so there's the guarantee of heaven, there's the guarantee of vindication, and also the guarantee of being kept until that last day when he puts all things right. So verse 10, he goes on to say, 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.

What is this hour of trial? Well, it's a bit tricky to work out. But we are told, we do know in the rest of Revelation, that last phrase, inhabitants of the earth, always refers in Revelation to non-Christians.

[14:59] And so something is going to come and test them, some sort of judgment perhaps. But it's actually going to come on the whole world, it says just before that. And so we Christians will be caught up with it.

And in the rest of Revelation, what we seem to see is judgment, things happening now in this world, which Christians get caught up with, but also test non-Christians.

Things like disasters, natural disasters, and wars, and the like. God allows these things to happen to test non-Christians, to see if they'll turn to him, cry out to him for help, or harden their hearts against him.

And since this is a case, the verse that says he'll keep us from the hour is really meaning he'll keep us from spiritual harm during that hour, not from physical harm.

And in fact, he'll not just keep us from spiritual harm, from falling away, he'll even grow our faith in Christ. That's why a Christian and a non-Christian can go through the same suffering, but have two different responses, can't they?

[16:10] Have you ever seen that? A non-Christian will go through suffering and go, see, there is no God, he can't exist. But a Christian will go through it and say, well, God sees the bigger picture. I don't. What's more, I know that God himself has suffered in Christ for me, and opened the way to a world to come where there'll be no more crying, or mourning, or pain.

And so even though I don't know why, I'm going to trust in him who knows why. Chalk and cheese, isn't it? Same suffering, different response. I've seen it happen.

That lady I mentioned before whose children, adult children, mocked her faith, she was caught up in the trial of suffering. But despite what her children said, I actually saw her faith grow in Christ during that time.

And I said at her funeral, how is this possible? Well, because God kept her from spiritual harm during that hour of trial.

That's how it's possible. And, while most of her adult children's hearts were hardened, one did soften, I think, towards God. And the point is, God will keep us from spiritual harm during this hour of trial, which I think, with the rest of Revelation in mind, is really the time between Christ's first coming and second.

[17:32] And so it's a long hour. And that hour feels like it's taking a long time, doesn't it? Especially if we're caught up in some sort of suffering ourselves. And so Jesus adds more encouragement in verse 11.

Four words, I am coming soon. Now, I realise he said that 2,000 years ago, so that doesn't seem like soon, does it?

But as you know, we need to remember that we humans think in terms of lifespans, but God thinks in terms of an eternal span. It's kind of like, you know, when you were children, Christmas seems like it takes forever to come around, doesn't it?

But when you're adults, the years just fly by, you have those different perspectives on time.

Someone told me they had Christmas in July the other week, already Christmas? God sees things differently to the way we do.

But soon does mean it's the very next big thing on God's to-do list, as it were. Here's his to-do list, create the world, tick. Call ethnic Israel, tick. Send his son to save, tick.

[18:43] Grow true Israel, that is the church, while it's in progress. And the next big thing, send son to judge and reward. Soon means, it's the next big thing in God's to-do list.

It means that there'll be no delay, no cancelled flights. He's not coming via Jetstar or whatever. He won't wait one second longer than planned.

And so here's the motivation. Since I've placed an open door before you, since I will vindicate you, since I will keep you from spiritual harm, and since I am coming soon, then hold on.

Point two, the rest of verse 11. He says, hold on to what you have, so that no one will take your crown. As I said before, this is the only command outside of verse 13, which is the same verse for every church, the only specific command for this church, to hold on to what they have.

And what do they have? We've already heard back in verse 8. They've been keeping Christ's word and not denying his name. In other words, they've been holding on to Christ.

[19:59] And so they're to keep holding on to him for life, because if they let go, they'll lose life. In 1932, the US Navy launched a massive helium-filled airship to carry planes.

Here it is, a picture of the airship. It was the world's first purpose-built flying aircraft carrier. I didn't even know they had these until I found it online. But on the 11th of May, 1932, while I was at Camp Kearney in California for refuelling, there was a tragedy.

The sailors were trying to hold the guy ropes that dropped down from the airship to hold it in place so they could refuel. It's a bit hard to see, but that clump in the middle of the screen is a whole bunch of sailors trying to hold the guy ropes.

But it got away from them and most of them let go except for three of them. And they were taken up into the air and sadly, two of them let go and lost their life.

But the third kept holding on for two hours at 2,000 feet in the air. He held on until he was able to be pulled up to safety into the airship.

[21 : 16] And here he is, 19-year-old Bud Cowart. When they interviewed him, in fact, there's a YouTube video of this, he expressed sadness at the loss of his mates, but he also said being safe in that airship, airship, I quote, was a grand and glorious feeling.

And you can imagine that, can't you? after two hours at 2,000 feet? Well, 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 world to come which will be a grand and glorious feeling.

Of course, sometimes it's hard to hold on, can't it? Especially when we're weary from suffering. But since it's a matter of eternal life or death, Jesus gives them further encouragement.

Point three, verse 12. He goes on to say, the one who is victorious, the one who holds on, I will make a pillar in the temple of my God. Never again will they leave it.

Here, the idea is that they will always be in God's house. You've heard the expression, they're part of the furniture. Have you heard that expression?

[22 : 32] It means they're always there, they never leave, that kind of thing. Someone said that of me recently, and you're part of the furniture now. Yes. And that's the idea here, they're made, not part of the furniture, but part of the structure, a pillar in God's temple, God's house.

And the point is made clear by the next phrase, never again will they leave it. People often actually had to leave their own houses in Philadelphia because it was prone to earthquakes.

But if they hold on, they'll never have to leave God's house. Now to grasp how good this promise is, we need to remember how great God's house is.

Like the psalmist in Psalm 84 who says, how lovely is your dwelling place, your house, Lord Almighty. My soul yearns, even faints for the courts, the temple courts of the Lord.

And the well-known verse, better is one day in your courts than a thousand elsewhere. I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than dwell in the house of the wicked. How good must God's house be for him to say, I'd rather one day in God's house than a thousand in Fiji, Bora Bora, I don't know, pick the nicest place you can think of, escape to the country.

[23 : 51] One day in God's house is better than a thousand in those places. In fact, he says, my soul yearns, even faints to be in God's house.

It's the place to be, in other words. And Christ says to the one who holds on, you'll be a permanent fixture in that place to be, never to leave it again.

And secondly, in the rest of verse 12, he says, 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.

They'll be given some more names, which again would have carried special significance for Philadelphia who was given several new names after different emperors and even today it's called Al-Shahir.

Only here they'll be given the names of God, the new Jerusalem and Jesus' new name. To name something means it belongs to you, doesn't it? That's why kids put their name on their jumpers and their pencil cases and books to show that it's theirs.

[24 : 59] And so Jesus will write the name of God on us to show that we belong to him, not to the emperor or some other ruler, but as God's precious people, we are his.

And the name of the new Jerusalem to show that we belong there as its citizens. That new Jerusalem that is coming down in Revelation 21 where there'll be no more crying or mourning or pain.

We belong there. That's our true home. And Jesus will write his new name on us. A name that's new not because it's a different name but because it has a different status now.

He's still Jesus but by his resurrection he was publicly proclaimed Lord. He was the Lord before but now he's publicly proclaimed Lord. and before he was Jesus the God-man who walked on earth but now he is Jesus the God-man who is glorified in heaven.

It's a new status, a glorified status. And so by writing his new name on us it shows we belong to Jesus and his new status as glorified brothers and sisters.

[26 : 09] In fact, that's the idea we see in Isaiah 62. God's people will be given a new name and the nations will see our righteousness, our glory.

When Jesus comes again he will write on us his new name to show that we belong to him as his glorified brothers and sisters and all will see it.

And so at the moment down here in the front row is Earthly Bill. Earthly Bill is a pretty cool guy. Okay? He is, trust me. But once Christ returns and he writes Christ's new name on Bill he will be glorified Bill, not Earthly Bill glorified Bill and he will be even cooler.

I know it's hard to imagine Bill but you will be. That's the idea here. 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 and he'll write a new name on us. God, New Jerusalem his own.

[27 : 23] I mean is that not enough motivation to keep holding on? And so on the rollercoaster ride of the Christian life in the ups and downs and particularly the downs when we're suffering not just from health but particularly even from persecution then remember that guy from the start at the rollercoaster without the screaming but hold on to Christ for life.

Let's pray. Our gracious heavenly Father we thank you for this motivation given to the church in Philadelphia to hold on to Christ and his word. Father, help us to do the same we pray in Jesus name.

Amen.