

Small Church, Big Saviour

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[0 : 0 0] Well, let's turn to Revelation chapter 3, and we're going to read from verse 7 to verse 13, the sixth of the seven churches in Asia Minor that John was given the vision of, and we've reached the church in Philadelphia. We read, unto the angel of the church in Philadelphia write the words of the Holy One, the True One, who is the key of David, who opens and no one will shut, who shuts and no one will open. I know your works. Behold, I've 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 my word about 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'm 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 name. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. Amen. May God bless.

Let's read that reading from his holy word as we turn to consider this sixth church, this church in Philadelphia, this small church, the small church that of course worshiped a big saviour. I see things that we want to follow very simply this morning, the authority that we read off in the Lord Jesus as authority over the church, whether it's the church in Philadelphia or the worldwide church, the authority, the one who's been given all authority by his Father, the authority of the Lord Jesus. And then verse 8 to 9, we're going to look at opportunity, the opportunity that was given to that church in Philadelphia, the opportunity to witness, to show forth the Lord Jesus that we can certainly seek to apply in our own position and circumstance.

And then finally, the security that the Lord gives to his church that is faithful and true to him. So Philadelphia, this small church that worshiped our big saviour. Because we have to say that, of course, you know, so many, if not probably most churches in Scotland today, most churches are small churches, small in size. I mean, the majority even have churches in our own denomination are small, relatively small, even the so-called bigger churches of which we have. Some, several hundred and a Sunday, even these churches are still small in comparison to even some of the bigger mega churches that exist. I remember being, I was in Alabama six years ago, and going into one of the biggest churches in the southern states and standing in this pulpit, and just this church was utterly massive. I couldn't even see the back of the church, the whole building, the whole grounds, everything was just enormous.

You know, there are such churches in our world, but, you know, most of our churches that we know of, that we work in, that we've seen, we've worshipped in, are small churches. Small churches, small congregations. But, you know, even being a small congregation that we are in, in a relatively small denomination, doesn't mean that, you know, we've got a small God. It doesn't mean that we're little in terms of, you know, our effectiveness, our witness that where God has placed you to witness true. Because the church here in Philadelphia, in Asia Minor, it was a small church. And yet, this was a church that was fully commended by the Lord Jesus, commended for its work, commended for its witness. There are no rebukes in this vision. And so when we see what we're given here of this vision, what's been said of this little church in Philadelphia, in Asia Minor, in Turkey, is to be encouraged and be challenged. And yes, to see, yes, beyond what might appear to be a small congregation with small influence. No. Look beyond even the circumstances of the present and look to our great God and Saviour. Look to the one who knows you, the one who sees you, the one who loves you, the one who cares for you, the one who gives his comfort to the, even to the very little churches of our world. This church even, the churches you might say represented by, in many ways anyway, by the church in Philadelphia. What about Philadelphia?

[5 : 43] Well, Philadelphia was an inland city, as we said, in modern day Western Turkey. It's, what was it, something like 28 miles east of Sardis, the church we're thinking of last Sunday evening.

Both these cities had earthquakes. They had particularly bad earthquakes, certainly some 70 years before this letter was written. Philadelphia wasn't as badly damaged as Sardis, but the city certainly had frequent earthquakes. Somebody wrote about the city. The walls were cracked, the different different parts of the city, always suffering some particular damage. And in fact, not many people actually lived in the city itself. They prefer to live outside the rather crumbling city walls.

Most lived as farmers on the countryside. So what we've got so far then, that's going to link into the the words that we read there. It's a city that's prone to earthquakes. So the city itself is smaller because people aren't living in it for fear of their lives, I suppose. And what else about the city that has an impact on what's been said? There's a fairly large, relatively speaking, Jewish population. These Jewish people were mainly traders in Philadelphia were mainly traders in Philadelphia. It was also the center of the spread of the Greek language, Greek culture. So very much strategically placed to spread out that culture across Asia Minor. So bring all this together. You've got a city that's unstable. It's got frequent earthquakes.

There's a population afraid to live in the city. There's a Jewish presence there. And a city of the people there who do live there want to spread the Greek language and culture beyond themselves. And there's a church in this fragile place. There's a church that Jesus is speaking to to encourage, to encourage them in their faith and their service and their witness to the to the one true savior. To show that the true security that anyone can have is in the Lord Jesus, the one who has all authority over his church. As we as we read there in in verse seven, these words, the words of the Holy One, the true one who is the key of David, who opens and no one will shut to shut and no one will open. And then they've been told that there's a church that's got little power.

That little power, that little strength that that church had in Philadelphia, you know, the people would have been aware, the church would have been aware of their smallness. But Jesus is saying to them, look beyond even yourself, look beyond to me, says Jesus. Look to me, look to me, the head of the church.

[8 : 46] Look to the one who's who's the Holy One. Look to the one, the Lord Jesus, who's the true one. And you know, when you take your eyes of self, and you'll take your eyes even of the the so-called inadequacies that we can so often feel as a small church, then look to your great God and savior.

Look to the Lord Jesus. Look to the one true God. Look to God, Father, Son, Holy Spirit. Look to the eternal one. And when that happens, the whole perspective changes. You won't see yourselves as a little island in the sea of of rapid secularism. You'll see the church under the authority of the Lord Jesus. Because Jesus calls himself there the the Holy One, the true one. He's speaking of himself as as well in the same way that the the Old Testament writers spoke of God as the as the Holy One.

And Jesus is telling us, you know, he's got that supremacy over all these pagan gods around and that Jesus alone is the one to be worshipped. So Jesus is saying to this church, look, look to me.

I'm the head of your church. I'm the head of the whole church. I'm supreme over all who'd seek to threaten you, threaten you as a church. You may have little power, little strength in Philadelphia. But remember, you worship the one who's holy, powerful, the one who has all authority. He has all authority because he's the true one. He's the truth.

I am the way, the truth, and the life, said Jesus. And because he's the truth, there's nothing of any contradiction in Jesus. There's no imperfection in Jesus. He's utterly true.

[10 : 44] Nothing unreliable about Jesus. Nothing insecure about Jesus. So if Jesus is the true one, that church in Philadelphia, as this church here and all who worship the one true Lord and Savior, get rid of any sense of inadequacy, because you worship the one who's true. Jesus has formed you as a church, as a congregation. He's forming his church. He's shaping his church. And because he's the true one, you know that in his faithfulness, he'll never leave you, never forsake you. And yes, I'm very aware of the circumstances of the congregation that's very much happening at the moment. But be reminded, yes, there will be changes afoot. But you continue to worship the one who never changes, one who's the head of this congregation as he's the head of the church. And seek the more to find your confidence in him. Because he has promised, I will never leave you, never forsake you. He is your supreme authority. He's the head. He's the one who's all powerful, all true. And he rules and overrules for his glory. And it's a little bit more about Jesus and his authority here, as we're told in verse 7. He speaks of his holding the keys of David.

And really, this is going back to the time of King David, when you're reading, it's actually Isaiah 22, of an individual who was given authority by the king to admit a person into the king's presence, or to deny that access to the king. And when Jesus says here about himself, who opens and no one will shut and shuts and no one will open, then this speaks of authority. This is Jesus saying to this little church that, you know, I give you that permission, that give you that opening into the very presence of your heavenly father. I've given you that access by my life, by my death.

And, you know, again, go with that truth, that realization that you who are his, and that very access into the presence of your heavenly father. And with that realization, yes, go into the world. Go that, knowing that you have that full relationship with your heavenly father. You have access, even in our times of prayer, even in our prayer in church, even a prayer meeting, and your prayer at home, you have that access to the father and himself. And you're entering into the very presence of God. And you're received by the father.

Jesus said, no one comes to the father except through him. And so, you know, have that confidence to go boldly and to speak boldly and to go in strength of God the Lord when you're witnessing it for him in this, in these difficult times. So be encouraged to look to the one who has that authority as the holy one, and it's the true one. You're never alone. You who are his, you're never alone. And you're never without hope.

Yes, there's that temptation to think, well, we've just got little strength, little power. Can we do anything for the sake of the Savior? No. Don't listen to the lies of the evil one. Whether you're a little church or a great mega church in Broward, Alabama, in one sense it's irrelevant. Because what is relevant is that you who are Christ are under the authority of Christ, and you look to him. And don't look to yourself for that power. Look to him who gives you that enabling, that power. Because remember, you can do all things through him who strengthens you. So look to the authority of Jesus as the church there in Philadelphia were asked to consider whose they were and under whose authority they were.

[15:13] And when given that knowledge of the authority of Jesus, they've got that opportunity to serve him. You read that in verse 8. I know you've got little power in it. You've kept my word and haven't denied my name. I mean, Jesus says, I know. I know. We've seen this in other churches. Jesus knows each church individually. He knows each church through and through. He knew the deeds, the acts of that little church in Philadelphia, and he's not rebuking them. But he's giving them this, you might say, this window of opportunity. Jesus said, you know, he's got the key to allow sinners to have access to the Father. In other words, he's giving you that great gift of salvation. He's opened that door for that little church to enter the presence of the Father. But also we can say this, he's opened the door for witness, for mission, for evangelism. He's opened that door for each congregation that loves his name to go out into the world and to spread the truth of the gospel of the Lord Jesus. As we say, Philadelphia was a place that was the centre of, in many ways, centre of Greek language, Greek culture, to spread out that language and culture beyond itself. And Jesus is saying to this little church when he's speaking of opening that door, he's saying there's something far more noble and high than spreading language and culture. That's important.

But there's something far more important. And that's reaching out with the good news to the Lord Jesus. And you know, when we think of that language of opening the door, of going through that door of opportunity, think of what Paul said about the spread of the gospel through the door of God's opening.

1 Corinthians 6:9, a wide door for effective work is opened to me and there are many adversaries. Another example, Colossians 4:3, pray also for us that God may open to us a door for the word to declare the mystery of Christ.

And there in Philadelphia, God was opening that door, that door of opportunity for that little church to show its faithfulness. God gave us opportunities to show their faithfulness to the one true saviour.

No doubt, because that church was little, it had few resources, but it was still called to mission. And you know, for every little church today, God is still giving you these doors of opportunity to go through, to spread the good news of the Lord Jesus.

[18:16] Still an open door. We still live in a land where the door still is open for the Lord's people to, as it were, to show forth the love of the Lord Jesus. Yes, we well have, relatively speaking, meagre resources.

You may well feel we are jars of clay. We are, each one of us, sinful, weak, frail individuals. But God still gives that command, go, go under my authority.

Go in my strength, he says. The door's still open, and we thank God that the door's still open in this land for evangelism, for witness. The door's open.

There's a door open there to go through physically. We look at that open door, as it were, as an opportunity to go with the, sow the seed of the gospel, the good news. Yes, we talk about living in a day of small things.

That's true. But the door's still open for the Lord's people to testify to the one true Savior. And the Philadelphian believers there, they saw the open door before them, and they had to go through it, and they did go through it.

[19 : 29] And they were willing, they showed a commitment to go through that door. They weren't put off by the fact that they were a small church. Jesus says to them, I know that you have little power, but yet, as Jesus said, you have not denied my name.

You know, the same Lord spoke to Paul in these very similar words. Spoke to Paul in his weakness. We read in 2 Corinthians 12, my grace is sufficient for you.

My strength is made perfect in weakness. And as a small church, as small churches, you can often feel, think that we're weak. Yes, in many ways we are.

But remember, God gives you that strength. His strength is made perfect in weakness. Pray that the Holy Spirit will come upon even this congregation, this church, and enable you to do mighty things in his name.

Maybe you're afraid to speak. Maybe you're by natural character shy, retiring, reticent. God gives you that strength even to say a word for the Savior.

[20 : 45] Because remember, if you know that the authority is from the Lord Jesus, then you rest in that authority. The one who says to you, I am with you. I'm with you, I'm with you always.

Don't dwell in your weakness or your seeming inabilities. Remember when Jeremiah was told by God, when God told him to be a prophet. God appointed him to be a prophet.

And Jeremiah said, Oh Lord God, I don't know how to speak. I'm only a youth. But the Lord said to me, as Jeremiah writes, Don't say I'm only a youth. For to all to whom I send you, you shall go.

And whatever I command you, you shall speak. You know, we see examples, not just in Jeremiah, examples in Scripture of those whom God used in their weakness to show forth God's power.

Think of Gideon. Gideon with 300 men against the might of the Midianite army. And Gideon with these 300 men triumphing in the power of God.

[21 : 51] Think of David the shepherd boy against the giant Goliath. David knew he was weak individually, but he knew that, well, as David said to Goliath, You come to me with a sword and with a spear and with a javelin, but I come to you in the name of the Lord of hosts.

I think one more example. Think of the small band of apostles that, well, the 12 apostles, from which the church grew and continues to grow.

Think of the apostle Paul himself. He called himself the least of all the saints. And yet that one who was, as he said, least of all the saints, the Lord used to plant churches and write epistles and to build the church and to serve his Lord and testify that his Lord and Savior had never let them down.

And so the church in Philadelphia, they could testify that their Lord had never let them down. Yes, they were weak. But God had so strengthened them to keep their faith and not deny them, not deny them before the authorities in that city and not to deny them even before those who opposed them, as we read there in verse 9, those who said in the synagogue of Satan, who said they were Jews and are not, but lie.

You see, any church that proclaims Christ as the one true Lord and Savior, that church will be despised, despised by many.

[23 : 25] And so often by those who claim to be of God, and yet by behavior and attitude and teaching show that it's just not the case.

And here in Philadelphia, there were those who claimed to be of God, who claimed to be God's people, claimed to be Jews. But as Jesus is saying, they're not true Jews. They're not true people of God because they show it by their works, by their words, by their works.

They're so hostile to the truth. They were condemning the one who is the truth. You know, Jesus, when Jesus was on earth, he described Satan as the father of lies.

And Jesus is saying here, you know, to those who are so hostile to the church there in Philadelphia, they're not true. They're not true. They're not true covenant people of God. The people of the church in Philadelphia were being accused of not being true people of God, but being accused by the author of lies.

But God's assuring that little church. He's saying the tables are going to turn. And that those who tormented and harassed and mocked and attacked the church of Christ, Jesus is saying on the last day when Jesus returns, yes, they'll bow the knee to Jesus, but also bow the knee to those who remain faithful in this life.

[25 : 01] And that act of bowing down by those who hated Christ's church, they will know at that time, and we say it with such grief and sadness, but we'll know that all along it was the church whom Jesus loved.

They were the true ones. They were the ones who kept the robes white. They were the ones who were true followers of the Savior. And remember these words that Jesus says to the church there at the end of verse 9, I have loved you.

I have loved you. You know, he's saying, I've loved you in the past. I love you now. I've loved you always. I will love you always. So that even at times when, you know, you might even doubt your effectiveness as a church, remember the Lord Jesus saying to you as an individual, as a church, I have loved you.

I have loved you. And yes, when there'll be times when people who claim to be of God are accusing you, slandering you, despising you.

Remember the Lord Jesus saying to you, I have loved you. I've loved you then, now, and always. I have loved you.

[26 : 21] And with that knowledge of the Savior who has loved you, you know that you have that eternal security in him. You know, Jesus said, those who honor me, I will honor.

And, you know, in this letter to the church in Philadelphia, that's what Jesus is saying. He's saying to them, you've kept my word. You've endured opposition and you've endured it patiently.

Jesus is saying, I'm keeping you. And I will keep you when there's, you know, massive persecution of believers. It's the message then. It's the message now.

God preserves his church, yes, in times of testing, of trying, and struggle. Now, that's, of course, not to say that every Christian is going to be spared from a martyr's death.

But every Christian won't face severe hatred from others. Because every Christian does know levels, different levels of persecution, different level of suffering for your faith.

[27 : 28] But remember, God has said, I have loved you and God will keep you. It's that great promise that we sing in Psalm 121 of the Lord, our keeper.

God promises he will keep you, he'll keep you, he'll sustain you. He's the keeper of your soul. He'll never, ever loose you from his grip. Yes, as a small church, we can so often feel vulnerable and fragile, but keep trusting in the one who loves you, who's loved you from all eternity.

And yes, keep that promise, even as we said in these weeks and months that lie ahead. Because in God's love for you, in his care, in his keeping you, he's got a plan for you.

He says, a plan for all who are his. Remember, the Lord is your keeper. Keeps you now, he's watching over you. He'll provide for you as your keeper.

And he'll keep you now as he's promised to keep you for all eternity. There's that time, of course, when Jesus will return. As Jesus says to the church there, I'm coming soon.

[28 : 46] And if that's the case, and it is the case, then it's your prerogative to keep persevering in the name of the Lord Jesus. Because you have that promise of that crown, that crown of life.

Verse 11, hold fast what you have so that no one may seize your crown. And again, this is, of course, an analogy to the Greek games when a competitor could lose that crown, he could be disqualified for some misdemeanor on the track.

And we have to say this, and we say it again with grief and sadness, that yes, as we've seen in history, we've seen it even in our own land, a church can lose the presence of its place, especially when it becomes complacent, when God condemns a particular church.

Faithful churches, as we've seen, can become unfaithful. Vibrant churches, the big churches that existed a century and a half ago no longer existing.

Vibrant churches become slothful, become disobedient. Churches that were once at the epicenter of a community, they can become so fragile and even fringe entities.

[30 : 07] Without going into detail, there are many church buildings up and down the land that were once at the very center of a community. And now if they exist at all, either tiny or used for any other purpose other than the worship of the one true God, we've got to be so aware, so careful.

To remain faithful, to persevere to the end, to hold fast what God has given to you and His blessing and His giving you His word, His truth.

One more thing before we finish, because Jesus gives one more thing, and that's for the promises regarding the security of the Lord's people.

because, you know, as we said, Philadelphia was a city that endured many earthquakes. The temples there, the cracks in the structure, the pillars falling down, and the believers there have been told in the last verses, don't fear, don't fear being, as it were, being toppled like these pillars and these temples, because you can never be moved, never be shifted, as it were, from the security that you have in the one true Savior.

Even in the smallest churches, even in the large churches, you have a security, a blessing, and Jesus speaks of the blessing in three ways. Fascinating.

[31 : 33] Three names that Jesus says will be inscribed on every believer. The name of my God, the name of the city of my God, the New Jerusalem, and then my new name.

What's Jesus telling us here? Well, he's saying, you know, every believer has the name of God on them. You know, in other words, you're owned by God. You read in the Old Testament, number six, they will put my name on the Israelites and I will bless them.

So having the name of God on you tells you you're owned by God. You're his. God's name is on every single believer. You know, when you put your name in a book that shows it belongs to you, I've been going through many, many, a book in the last week and so often I'm seeing my name in a book with a particular year or a particular place and it says, that's my book.

Well, God's put your name in his book. You belong to him. That book written in the Lamb's Book of Life, your name is there.

And, yes, you're owned by God. What's more, you're a citizen, even now, a citizen of the New Jerusalem. Yes, it's yet to come down from heaven, but you've already got your name there in the register of that city, that heavenly city.

[32 : 55] And awaiting you, awaiting you there will be a new name placed upon you. Further glories still to be, to be had, still to be known in the New Jerusalem.

and you'll know and see and serve the one who gave his name for you. Yes, as we've said, the church in Philadelphia, so many churches through the centuries have been small, small in earth, but the heavenly reward and rewards that await every small church, every group of believers in every small church, to collect beyond measure.

So persevere, yes, ask God, yes, to give the increase, but persevere, yes, with what you have, that little strength, that little power. But remember, you're not forgotten by God.

Yes, you may feel inadequate and marginalized, but hold fast to what you have. There's so much more work to be done even from this very congregation.

serve him with all your might, all your strength. Be encouraged, be encouraged, and don't lose heart, but look to the one who speaks to the churches, even who spoke to the churches 2,000 years ago and continues to speak to the churches today by his word.

[34 : 26] Look to him, hear him, hear his word to you, calling you not to give up, not to faint, but to go in strength of God, the Lord.

Amen. Let us pray. Our Lord, our God, our Heavenly Father, we thank you for that encouragement of your word.

May we not give up, not feel despondent, not feel that weakness is a defining principle, but look to the Lord Jesus.

look to him who has promised his people never to leave them, never to forsake them. And so, Lord, bless, bless your people here, we pray.

May they go in strength of God the Lord. Hear us as we continue in worship before you now. We pray these things in Jesus' name. doesn't want the God to pray these things or shall 12 in sync PAUL as we came to opening Lord Jesus.

[35 : 29] Send contact to this or today will go through