

# To the Church in Philadelphia

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Preacher: Rev Donald M Macleod

[ 0 : 00 ] Well, let's turn back to God's Word, back to Revelation, of course, back to chapter 3, Revelation chapter 3, carrying on our series.

We're almost there, of course, there's two more churches to go this evening, and then, Lord willing, next week we end our time with the churches. Revelation chapter 3, and we can read together verses 7 down to verse 13 of the chapter.

And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write, And to the angel of the elders who are 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.

He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. As we're coming almost to the end of our short series, we've been, of course, six weeks now, and Lord willing, next week, seven weeks, looking at the church.

[ 2 : 03 ] If you remember, actually, it's an eight-week series, our first series, our first sermon, we actually did an overview of where we're going, an overview of sorts. So we've been a few weeks now in the churches, and here we are, again, something unusual this evening, in that this is one of the two churches we said before.

I won't test you whichever church it is, but one of the two churches where Christ has nothing negative to say towards them, he has nothing to say to them in terms of their own sin.

Where he speaks to them only of what they're doing well, but also of the situation that they're facing. And we'll carry the same pattern on, just looking at it section by section.

We'll know now that the format of the letters, every letter has almost exact same format, different lengths, different structures, but the basic format is the same. Here again we have the church, the angel of the church in Philadelphia.

So what does Christ say to the Christians in this town, this city, a wealthy city, a culturally rich city, a city known for its, I'm not giving a name, but it's known for its openness towards travellers, towards those who pass by its borders.

[ 3 : 24 ] Philadelphia comes from its supposed origin story that it was gifted from brother to brother, to ruling brothers, and the Greek there, the Latin, the Greek of love there, is Philo of course, the brotherly love.

And that's where we get the town of Philadelphia, the town of brotherly love. So it was known for being an open town, a welcoming city, welcoming to all who'd travelled through it.

Of course welcoming we'll see in a second, to everyone of course, apart from the Christians who resided in the city, but we'll get to that in a second. So how does Jesus identify himself to this small gathering of Christians in Philadelphia?

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. First of all, the Holy and True One, just as we read it, he first of all reminds them, almost as we saw last week, he reminds them as to his ability and his only ability, only he has the ability to rule and to reign.

He alone can call himself and is called the Holy One. We know ourselves, there's none holy but him, not the Holy Roman Empire, not the Holy Roman Emperor, not any other governor, but he alone is holy.

[ 4 : 53 ] He alone is perfect, not only in his person, but also perfect in what he does. He's perfect in all his judgments and all his rulings. He is perfect as he rules over and reigns over and makes full use of his church, his people.

He is the only Holy One. There is no sin to be found in him. He is perfect in all that he is and all that he does. He's also the only True One.

Again, we can't dwell on this too much, but it's interesting here that although this was a welcoming town, we know from some sources, we won't dwell on this because we can't say for sure, but some sources, secular sources, point to the fact that what we perhaps would call gambling today was also quite rife in Philadelphia.

They had, I say casinos, it wasn't casinos, they didn't have casinos, but that kind of establishment, whatever the equivalent was, whatever they would call it, it's very, very unsure. It's quite new, actually, the study that the archaeologists are doing into.

But Philadelphia comes up or the area around Philadelphia, somewhere where you'd have all the people passing through, all these well-welcome visitors, but also they'd be swindled out of their money as they pass through the town.

[ 6 : 09 ] They'd be cheated out of their money. They'd be having money gambled away from them, of course, by those who knew the odds better than they did. So this city might have been known for being welcoming, but also it might have been known for being full of money wranglers, full of those who are happy to part you from your money via lies and via cheating.

And Christ reminds this small church, whatever might be deceitful in your presence, whatever world you might be living in, whatever deceitfulness is taking place in your town, in your city, he alone is true.

He alone is the one whose words are eternal, whose words are perfect, whose words never change. And bear in mind, as Christ speaks, he's speaking to a small church, a small gathering of Christians.

And we keep saying, probably like ourselves here, ourselves next door perhaps, maybe a big church in this day, in this age, of these letters being written. They were small gatherings, small gatherings of Christians.

And as this small gathering is reminded just who Jesus is, he reminds them that despite what we might think or what we might fear, that he has promised, and he's about to promise some incredible things to them.

[ 7 : 23 ] And because his words are true, because he is the true one, what he's about to promise them will be true for them. No matter what we might think or worry about, what he says is true, or the promises of them is true.

And the promises we have to the church in Philadelphia, we can, in a sense, apply to ourselves, as we have in previous weeks, we've applied the warnings to ourselves and the promises.

No different this evening. We apply some of the promises we have here. Because some of these promises apply to the wider church, and we see that more in a second. He's the holy one, he's the true one.

Also he's the one who has, as we see here, the key of David, who opens and shuts, and shuts and opens. And the key of David reference, Isaiah 22, verse 22, where it's mentioned in other places, but this is the most explicit mention of this exact phrase, where in Isaiah 22, God speaks to, well, through Isaiah, to Al-Qayyim, who's, of course, at that point, who is representative of God's purposes.

If you have time to read Isaiah 22, it's well worth a good read this evening. But God, speaking through Isaiah, tells this person who was representative of God, who is effectively representing what Christ would be, a shadow of Christ.

[ 8 : 45 ] And he says, I will place on his shoulder the key to the house of David. What he opens, no one can shut. And what he shuts, no one can open. So what God used to describe the God-given earthly power of this man, we then take that and apply it, of course, to Jesus.

This man was a shadow of who was to come. And Jesus, of course, we see and we know is the final, through David. He is the lineage of David and in him alone we see the full promise that was given to David, fully established and fully realised.

the key of the house of David, the key of David, quite literally. In other words, it's all his. It's all his.

All the promises are made complete in him. All the hope is complete in him. And all the future reality that these Christians are waiting for is only found complete in Jesus.

And it gives him this hope and we'll see in a second why they need so much hope. Verse 8. Here we begin to see their situation. Verse 8.

[ 9 : 56 ] I know your works. Behold, I have set before you an open door which no one's able to shut. I know that you have but little power and yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name.

I know your works. We saw last week, didn't we, with Thyatira when Jesus says to them in chapter 2, verse 19, I know your works. And we saw that was quite a promising thing for them to hear.

Then we heard in Sardis a week before that where Christ said to them, I know your works. But for the poor Christians in Sardis when they heard that it was a reason for them to fear, wasn't it?

I know your works. You have a reputation of being alive but you're dead and so on. Well this evening we see the works of the church in Philadelphia, their service towards Jesus, who they were as Christians.

They were to be encouraged. I know your works. I know who you are, says Jesus. Again, we pass over this perhaps because we see it week after week. But imagine these poor Christians as they're reminded that Jesus knows you, dear Christians.

[ 11 : 03 ] Jesus sees you, dear Christians, in Philadelphia. Jesus knows the trouble that you're facing day after day, week after week. He sees it, he knows it and he's with you.

No one else will appreciate the work of the Christians in Philadelphia. We can talk to, we can go to test schools or go in town and meet other Christians in the Cope and talk to them about what's happening in our own congregations.

We can pick up the phone and talk to someone that's a Christian and encourage them or even perhaps being honest, share our worries about our congregations and our stresses and strains.

These Christians didn't have this. The Christians in Philadelphia, there's no one they can go to, humanly speaking, who can listen to them. They're on their own in this city.

Perhaps they have some letters coming and going, we see that of course, but the reality is for most of the year, they only have each other, for most of the year, most of their ministry, they're on their own.

[ 12 : 02 ] They're seeking to serve God as best they can in a city which is vehemently against them. And in that, Jesus says to them, I see you, I know you, I know how hard you're working, I know how hard you're trying and seeking to serve me, despite all the opposition.

He encourages them by reminding them that before them there is this open door. Behold, I have set before you an open door which no one is able to shut. Takes us back to how he describes himself, isn't he?

He's the one of the key of the house of David. He's the one of all the power that we saw just manifested so humanly in David. Christ has it fully that he has full ability to say to the Christians of Philadelphia that he is opening a door before them.

Now, what that means there is various understandings and it's wrong for us to say there's one right way because going back from the church fathers who were writing shortly after this letter, they offered different ideas as to what the church of Philadelphia experienced by this open door.

And just because there's different ideas it doesn't mean any of them are wrong. They all actually apply and they all apply to us too actually in some senses. The open door could well perhaps be an open door of blessing from God.

[ 13 : 28 ] that Christ was about to provide some form of blessing to this congregation. The letter itself as he received it from the Apostle John would be a blessing to them but from that perhaps it would be more conversions perhaps it would be an increase in membership an increase of folks coming in and hearing the gospel an increase of the ability they had to share the gospel we don't know some form of blessing.

What we do know and we can see in a second is whatever this open door was it was one these Christians were sure to make full use of.

And if we're saying at least part of this open door Christ set before them it is the hope and the promise that they can go and share the gospel faithfully with full knowledge that they do the Lord's work in doing so then the question for ourselves is and the point to make for ourselves is how much more our door is open as it were in Tulsa.

These Christians in Philadelphia had an open door living in a city which was seeking any excuse to imprison them and get rid of them. They had an open door given to them to share the gospel amongst other things in a place and an age and a time where there was hatred true hatred for the Lord and for all the gospel stood for.

Now I know our day isn't easy perhaps for some people as our brother prayed there are parts of this world where to be a Christian is almost a death sentence if not that much then to be a Christian is at least a confession that you're willing to lose your livelihood your home your respect and so on and so on if not your life.

[ 15 : 19 ] That's not the situation we have in Tolstair is it? Here we've been given an open door and so far in our congregation and so far in our wider community that door is not yet shut does it?

Well how do we know that? Because we're here this evening. We've been given this open opportunity to share the gospel we have an open door here with our neighbours those who live beside who we get to know over time who we have ways to serve and ways to show them practically if need be the love of Christ to be good neighbours in a community sense of course with that to be good neighbours in a Christian sense we're there to serve and to seek ways to serve and through that service we then share the gospel with them we must use words actions alone don't say we must talk about Jesus we know that but we must first get to know our neighbours and get to know those around us I know it's easy for me to say this it's easier when you move into somewhere new to actually get to know people I can play the Godoch card the Clueless card I can walk around the village and not know people and ask who they are and play that card and it's still working for me quite well but after a while it's harder to speak to your neighbours after a while it's harder to really engage with the community but we've been given an open door we also have an open door and perhaps we don't see it really in Tolstoy in that you still have a community here even speaking of our places even down in South Lochs our community sense of community is far less than you have here in Tolstoy and I can say that honestly that's not saying to bolster you to make you feel good about yourself but it's a genuine truth in God's goodness towards this congregation he has set you in a community where there's still community events taking place there's still ways to do things people still come to things people still engage in things

I know it's not like it was once but you have it better in Tolstoy than we have in many places around our island there's open door for us there it just takes a bit of thinking for us of how we get the gospel out to those who as of yet are not hearing it we also have the open door the open opportunity that those in Philadelphia did not have and that we have years of legacy here years of gospel witness and although that has this downside in that it also brings with it years of Christians failing to serve our saviour well and that has ramifications as we all know but also years of prayer have been poured into this place years I've covered this before in the church a few weeks ago years of prayer have been poured out into the gospel work in this congregation and in our friends and our brothers and sisters next door there have been years of prayer years of faithful prayer generations of prayer prayers generations would never see answered as they prayed forward to children and grandchildren to the future saving of this village we have an open door in that and that we go out knowing our work our ministry our service as Christians in our homes in our village it is saturated in prayer not just our prayers but the prayers of those long since gone before us into glory the saints in Philadelphia had an open door in a very restricted atmosphere a very restricted community situation we have an open door in what the saints in Philadelphia would not believe how free we are to share the gospel they had no notion of an open public building like a church they had no notion of meeting just now with our doors unlocked and our blinds open our windows open they had no notion of that they wouldn't believe how lucky how fortunate we have it in God's grace we do have a good opportunity to share the gospel in Tulsa we have an open door set before us we have neighbours and friends and family members who as of yet have no care no interest in the gospel and as salt and as light we are of course called to be there to serve the Lord and it wasn't easy of course for our friends our brothers and sisters in Philadelphia and brothers and sisters it's not easy today either don't think for a second not for a second and you have to be careful not to put too much of yourself in your pulpit but don't think for a second that just because you do four years in Edinburgh and you learn your languages and you learn your theology and you do all the work don't think for a second that it becomes any easier to go and tell someone a close family member about the gospel it certainly doesn't as those close to me will confirm plenty of gospel conversations

I walk away from either almost in tears or walk away from thinking what a disaster brothers and sisters we're all in us together we're all in us together the open door is given to each one of us to share the gospel to this glorious community the Lord has placed us in the Christians of Philadelphia have this open door but as Christ reminds them I know you have little power I know you have little power and yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name they're seeking to serve Jesus in a place where to deny his name would mean a much easier life for them a freer life an easier way of living they would live more freely and much more easily they just deny Jesus and go on with their lives but no they don't deny Jesus they keep on serving him and they have little power they have zero political power they have zero say over the community the city they live in they are just there to serve the Lord as he leads and as he guides them we might feel and we might certainly admit that we have little power

I know we look back to days gone by and you think back yourselves to times when this gathering a prayer meeting on a Sunday was double or triple the numbers we have today we have little power humanly speaking we have little impact humanly speaking we have little chance of doing much good work humanly speaking and if we are to spend our time I'm not saying we do but just a warning to us all if we spend our time thinking back to the apparent glory days and instead lose sight of where we are now what God has placed us and where he's placed us just now then we lose sight of what's being said here yes for little power but brothers and sisters as we all know it's little power that God uses to accomplish his glorious wonder working saving reality it's little Christians with little power that God uses it is very little ministers with very little power that God uses to preach it's very weak Christians with very small faith that God uses to bring about his purposes

[ 22 : 26 ] Christ knows how small we are Christ knows how weak we are Christ knows at times how unwilling we are to do anything we're called to do but yet we do it why?

because like the Christians in Philadelphia we have no other option because we love our Saviour and because we love we want to serve him and how do we serve him? we serve him by sharing the gospel if we do nothing we are effectively denying his name if we do nothing we are not fulfilling our task as being salt and light we're called to be ambassadors every one of us myself very much included we're called to be ambassadors to be salt and light if we're not fulfilling these duties at least not seeking to fulfill these duties then we're not proclaiming his name as we should it's a challenge to all of us and this poor church they're serving Christ despite small power but also with great opposition just briefly we can see in verse 9 onwards we see they've got great trouble behold I will make those of the synagogue of Satan who say that they're Jews but 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 again there's great discussion as to who these members are of these Jews quite simply

I think is what I would go with but there's other interpretations that also make sense but there was Jews also who were more than willing to take part in the persecution of the Christians there were Jews who were more than willing to encourage and root out the Christians there were Jews who were faithful in their attack of the gospel so much so that Christ says they're not even Jews at all because they despise his gospel so much because they despise all that he is so much they are not his people and he calls them a synagogue of Satan how far they've fallen but look what Christ assures the church of Philadelphia the day is coming when all those who are their enemies will see how much he has loved them how much he loves them because you have kept my word in verse 10 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 it is the reality that before us there is this great hour now when some read verse 10 they would argue and there is some argument for this personally I don't think so but we'll address it first when some read of this hour of trial that is coming on the whole world

I know I don't need to say this but just of course the hour there is not a literal hour it's just an expression I know that's clear to us I'm assuming but this time of trial that is coming towards us some will say that only applied to the church in Philadelphia that he's speaking to them so this church would face a time of trial you could wrangle that perhaps but it seems quite clear that when Christ speaks here to this church he's speaking to all his people because he speaks here so broadly doesn't he behold I will make sorry behold behold because you kept my word of the patient endurance I will keep it from the hour of trial verse 10 that's coming on the whole world to try those who dwell on the earth it's too broad to make this just about Philadelphia so when Christ speaks here what is he speaking about or who is he speaking about well we said this before quite often when Christ addresses these churches he addresses them in ways which makes sense only if we take it as addressing the wider church of course our saviour knew that these words these letters would be read by his church across the world and across the ages so we come to read this what encouragement are we given what hope are we given we're given the hope that on the final day on the final day when all around us perhaps if we're spared in that day when all around us will be suffering when all around us as we read in Revelation we read us to the bowls of wrath it's a hard chapter in one sense to read it's it's a with respect there's horrifying imagery in that but so there should be when we read that as to the plagues and the bowls of wrath being poured out did you note what's taking place wrath after wrath bowl after bowl is being poured out and there's this constant refrain wasn't there in the chapter that constant refrain yet they didn't repent yet they didn't repent this horrendous thing happens yet they cursed God and didn't repent all that to say that

Christians on the final day those of us who may well still be here if it happens tomorrow or it happens next century or next millennium we don't know but those who be left behind we will indeed see as God pours out his wrath but when God pours out his wrath as Christians it will not touch us we will go through times of tribulation we know that we know the church is not kept from tribulation rather the church goes through tribulation in the final days the persecutions arise and the progress and so on that's a different series we won't escape human suffering in the final days that increases it seems as time goes on but what we do escape as Christians is God's response to that as God sees his people persecuted his people attacked he pours out before the end his wrath on the earth in various ways and over various time frames all to say that Christ will keep his people safe

[ 28 : 22 ] Christ will keep his people safe but there's nothing in one sense that can touch his people and of course we know that in one sense we go through much pain much sadness many moments of anguish and worry and everything else we know that ourselves but also as Christians we also can say that he keeps us not in a trite way not in a small way not in a passing flippant way but in a true way he keeps us we have a sure hope that when the end comes or in our lifetime or not that he will keep his people and keep them safe we will face persecution yes we may be killed with a sword yes but he will keep us safe from the wrath of God that applies physically at the end but also applies of course to each one of us those of us who pass away before the end comes he will keep us safe from the wrath of God why because we die we die knowing we die knowing that we die with the covering of the imputation of righteousness of our saviour who has taken on himself the full wrath of all the sins of all his people and in his perfection we can die knowing that we will open our eyes in glory we will fear the end brothers and sisters we fear the end we fear the physical reality of the end of days or the end of our own lives there's nothing wrong with that it's natural death isn't natural so it's natural for us to fear death the process of dying and the physical reality of dying it's horrific and we know that there's no sin in fearing that there's no sin in dreading that but Christians as it applies to the last days it applies to the last hours of our own life perhaps the last seconds of our lives we might well fear the destruction around us and death the destruction taking place in us but we do not and we should not fear what happens after it all

Christ keeps his people safe the Christians in Philadelphia he reminds them here I am coming soon verse 12 the one who conquers what does Christ promise to the one who keeps on serving him to the end I will make him a pillar and a temple of my God what a glorious image these poor Christians in Philadelphia who are so easily shaken and who are so easily attacked by the world surrounding them who have no as it were fixed church to worship in who have no nice building to go to who are worshipping probably in someone's house or worshipping in a barn as it were worshipping quite literally out behind underneath some trees we don't know our situation but this small gathering of God's people worshipping in secret Christ promises the day is coming and I will make him a pillar in other words he will be a permanent fixture dear Christian you and I will be permanent fixtures in the eternal unbreaking unending kingdom of God in the temple of God we will be placed never shall he go out of it and here we see the writing of the names the glorious reality that will be acknowledged as being gods acknowledged as being citizens of the new kingdom new Jerusalem new heavens and new earth acknowledged as being longing to Christ and him alone that's the future of the Christians of the Philadelphia that's the future brothers and sisters for us too for the day is coming and for some of us the day perhaps is sooner than ever where we will be acknowledged as his own eternally present with him people never again to leave never again to go outside as aware of the city limits the new heavens and the new earth comes and we'll all join together and be permanent fixtures as it were in the temple of God not transient not wanderers not sojourners in this earth will be fixed not physically of course not we will have freedom in new heavens and new earth but spiritually we are fixed with God no more sin no more wandering away no more heartbreak despite the oppression this church faced despite the heartbreak we are sure we are faced despite the ongoing stresses and strains of seeking to serve

God with little resources and little power Christ reminds him I see you I know you I will keep you and I will take you home to be with me at the end of time never to leave my side ever again always in my presence time without end to bow our heads and a word of prayer Lord we ask for this reality to be true for each one of us this evening that we can leave this place knowing that we can call ourselves your people we thank you for promises we had to the Christians in Philadelphia Lord we know that their plight was hard at times and we know and we give you praise that you kept your church and you kept your people and that those who read this letter first that you were true to your promise and you took them home to be with yourself now at this moment they along with ourselves are awaiting that final day awaiting that day of glory that day of horror yes that day of of abject horror for those who are your enemies but that day of glory for all who love you and always serve you we will find ourselves as pillars as it were in the new heavens and the new earth permanent fixtures permanently placed in your presence in your glory never again to see sin and never again to see the destruction of our bodies and our minds and never again to see the ravages of illness and age in our bodies and our minds and our person but eternally spending endless days in your presence in your glory

Lord until these days come help us to serve you well give us wisdom we ask to make the most of the open door you've given us in this district help us to have the wisdom to be faithful witnesses to search out opportunities to share the gospel to be salt and light we ask that for ourselves individually but also for ourselves as a congregation as a gathering as a family gathering of your people we ask these things asking also for the ongoing forgiveness of sin we give you praise that we can know for certain that our sins are cleansed through the finished work of a saviour for all who come to know him and call him ours let's call these things in and through and for Christ's precious name's sake Amen let's bring our time to a conclusion this evening again from the Psalter and this time from Psalm 69 Scottish Psalter



Psalm 69 Scottish Psalter Psalm 69 we can sing from verse 30 sing from verse 30 down to verse 34 if I can see you yeah Psalm 69 verses 30 down to verse 34 the name of God I with a song most cheerfully will praise and I in giving thanks to him his name shall highly raise this to the Lord a sacrifice more gracious shall prove than bullock ox or any beast that have both horn and hoof Psalm 69 30 to 34 to God's praise the name of God I will give a song most cheerfully will praise and I hear hear in■ through to him■ 70 to 35 his name shall highly amazing his name his name shall■■■

[ 37:13 ] THEME Servic Juris as as children Unworthy Geruchky Ánghúak, O debris Ánghúk, Ánghúkob When the lest the hand of men shall see, And joy to them shall give, For all is that your sick, the Lord, Your heart shall ever live.

For God will birth your child with all, His flesh and flesh condemn, disciple and curse, In the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God the Father and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit both for you now and forevermore. Amen.