

Revelation 3:7-13 “The Source of the Church’s Power”

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 04 October 2026

Preacher: Will Spink

[0:00] You are listening to a message from Southwood Presbyterian Church in Huntsville, Alabama! Our passion is to experience and express grace. Join us.

! More challenging but more glorious visions of heaven.

I want to remind us briefly of the importance of these letters as we're wrapping them up. Jesus writing specifically to these particular churches, but clearly each of these letters to all of His churches in all times. There's something here for us too, right?

He addresses churches who are enduring persecution, who are battling heresy, who are serving faithfully. Some of them are bigger than others. Some of them have greater zeal than others. Some of them have different gifts from others. But what's so instructive, I think, for us is that every church, what we need to hear is Jesus' words, isn't it? Every single one of them, seven in a row from Him. It follows this vision of Jesus in chapter 1, and then that risen, reigning King gives words to His beloved people. He is what we need all the time in every situation.

[1:45] Secondly, yes, this is a sermon before the sermon, and then there's another sermon at the end. So, three points to the pre-sermon introduction. We need to hear Jesus' words to all of us together.

These aren't letters to individuals, but to whole churches, right? That churches need to deal with their sin together, need to endure persecution together, need to share the good news of Jesus with their neighbors together.

Jesus sees His people personally, for sure, but He sees and He addresses them together. So, we should read His Word on our own, but these letters are a reminder to us that we need to read God's Word in community, with a grace group, in a Bible study, with brothers and sisters, especially a reminder that we need to gather with His church to listen to God's Word.

Not mine, not an inspirational blog post. Jesus' Word is what we need every Lord's day together. Amen? And then finally, we need to hear Jesus' words to all of us together so that we live now in light of eternal reality.

[3:13] In every single one of these letters, what have we noticed? Jesus has a common pattern where He brings help to His people to be faithful today.

A primary way He does it is by reminding them of eternity. Of truth that's not going to change. Of perspective that is beyond this life.

If we are going to live as God's people in Huntsville in the 21st century, we need to hear Jesus' words together about eternity.

And then be convicted, be encouraged, be directed by our Savior and our King. So that's what we're doing again this morning.

We do it every morning even after we're through with the letters to the seven churches. But I wanted us to remember that as we're opening our Bibles to God's Word in Revelation chapter 3, we're preparing to hear together Jesus' words to the church, specifically the church in Philadelphia, not the Northeast, Philadelphia over there.

[4:24] Revelation 3, we're going to start at verse 7. And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write, the words of the Holy One, the true One who has the key of David, who opens and no one will shut, who shuts and no one opens.

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

Behold, I will make those of the synagogue of Satan who say that they are Jews and are not but lie. Behold, I will make them come and bow down before your feet and they will learn that I have loved you.

Because you have kept 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 am coming soon.

Hold fast what you have so that no one may seize your crown. The one who conquers, I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God. Never shall he go out of it and I will write on him the name of my God and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem which comes down from my God out of heaven and my own new name.

[5:48] He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. Jesus, thank you. Thank you that you speak to us.

Would you help us now to hear you? To want to be directed by you? Even to want to be changed by you? That we might walk with you more and more and be the church that you've called us and that you're making us to be.

Do that even now. We trust by your Spirit and we ask in your name. Amen. For nearly 120 years, Govan Hill Free Church of Scotland has met in an old brick building on Belle Isle Street in Glasgow. That's a picture from just a few years ago when I was in my 30s. Hasn't been that long. Our family there with the minister who's been there for the past 25 years.

Further back than this, Christy and I lived with this pastor and his wife and attended that church as newlyweds for four months.

[7:17] If you had joined us during those four months for a service on a Sunday, you probably would have wondered if the church was going to be able to stay open much longer.

There are only 20, maybe 25 people in worship most Sundays. Over half of them each week would be over 80 years old. The building was under repair and the neighborhood where the building was located had become almost exclusively Muslim refugees from the Middle East who were settled there by the government as they waited to hear their asylum cases.

Many were discouraged and some people had suggested that the church should move to a different part of town. Certainly, the door was closing here, right?

Well, instead of that, these dear elderly saints decided that what others saw as a closed door, they would see as an open door for their hundred-year-old church.

They prayed to God and preached Jesus and loved their neighbors. They started ESL classes.

They took Muslim moms and toddlers on trips around Scotland to introduce them to their new country thanks in large part to Christie's youthful energy.

[8:47] They found an assistant pastor who spoke Farsi so they could communicate better with their neighbors. They became experts in navigating Scotland's legal asylum process and God worked.

God worked in neat ways, story after story that will echo in eternity. When we returned 17 years later, the numbers of this church were well, only a little bit higher than what they used to be.

Many of the ones that were there when we were first there had died. But we walked into a service full of Slovak and Czech Roma families, many of them gypsies, their new neighbors.

The church in Philadelphia was another church that appeared to everyone looking at them to have little power. Not a whole lot going on but that knew that the true source of a church's power is not numbers, it's not resources, it's not influence.

They too may have been discouraged by difficulties with their neighbors but their God, their leader, their true power source had much encouragement for them, didn't he?

[10:26] Don't you love that? How Jesus loves to encourage his discouraged churches. This entire letter, and we've seen seven now, they're not mostly like this, but here's the one that's hurting and he has nothing but encouragement for them.

He could have written letters to the seven largest or most influential churches in the region. He wrote to some of them. But see, seeming weakness for the people of God is just one more opportunity to rely on him rather than ourselves, right?

Spiritual poverty is yet one more reason to trust his inexhaustible riches. His strength is perfect, right?

And Jesus doesn't want us to miss that hope. That's what this letter is about. These are words, he's clear, that come from the Holy One, the True One.

These are titles for God himself given here to Jesus because he is the promised divine Messiah with the key of David.

[11:42] That's a reference there from Isaiah 22 that means that Jesus is the one who allows people into the king's palace, into the throne room where God reigns over his people.

Jesus is the one with the key to the door so no one can argue with him, no one can compete with him, he's in control. And so that one with the ultimate power who will render the ultimate verdict on this church that has very little power, it's not super impressive to those who are looking on, that one writes to them.

What's he going to say? I know your works. Uh-oh. That's not been a good sign, has it?

We haven't done enough. I knew he was going to shut us down eventually. We could have, should have. You have but little power.

I'm sorry, I'm sorry. I know we're not as big as that church down the street. I knew we should have posted on Instagram more often. That's what they were saying, I think.

[13:09] And yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name. Two things, right?

Kept his word, obediently following his direction themselves, faithfully praying and worshiping and preaching and not denied his name.

When external pressures came, they didn't compromise on the good news of Jesus. They didn't deny their allegiance to him so that things would go better and that more people would show up. They offered Jesus to everyone. They held forth the hope of Jesus for themselves and for their neighbors, even when they did it without much power.

So Jesus says, listen, little power church, lest you start to think that that was all in vain, that you start to fear that numbers are the measure of my love for you, or that numbers are the measure of your value to me.

[14:24] listen to me pour out encouragement upon you, oft discouraged church. That's what this whole letter does.

He's going to pile them up. First, you're granted an open door. You're not only significant enough, little church, that the king is writing to you.

I mean, that's amazing enough, but you're also invited into the king's palace, the throne room, by the one with the keys. Perhaps the picture of an open door is especially appropriate in light of the next verse, which has caused many to speculate that this church had been shut out of the local Jewish synagogue.

In other words, rejected by the Romans and the Jews in their city for their commitment to this Jesus. If that's the case, Jesus wants to reassure them that they've got acceptance somewhere. They've got access before the Holy One, the God of the universe. You won't be turned away at the king's door. You are welcome in the palace.

[15:38] Your salvation, your place with God is secure. The other way that open doors are often used in the Bible is as a picture of ministry opportunity, which also could fit here at a church perhaps discouraged by doors repeatedly slammed in their faces when they share of Jesus.

Perhaps you have but little power to push through a shut door by yourself, but what's the difference here? Jesus has placed before you an open door.

Walk on through. You don't have to shove your way in. Jesus has given it to you. Pastor Chuck Swindoll says it this way, the size of a congregation, the limitations of its location, or the restrictions of its budget should never determine its vision.

Instead, churches should set their vision based on the power of their God. God is infinite, magnificent, awesome, and mighty beyond description or comprehension.

When He chooses to open opportunities, the possibilities are endless. All we need to do is trust and follow Him where He leads.

[17:02] That's good. Where might Jesus open doors for us? See, don't start thinking, what's a door that we could push through with our own strength and our own resources and our own ideas and drive our own agenda?

Not that kind of door. This is where He sends us even when we don't think it makes sense to neighbors who speak a different language, to families with special needs we don't know if we're equipped to meet to someone nearby or a revival in Huntsville or someone around the world.

I don't know but we pray, right? What we're called to do, we admit that we don't have the power but He has the power. What might we do that would be clearly beyond us, right?

More than we could handle that would require God to show up or it's going to fail. Without Him there's no chance but we get the opportunity to trust Him to welcome us into His presence, He promises, and to let us bring others with us.

What a joy that would be. Second word of encouragement, you will be vindicated by Jesus' love. We don't know all of the details here but there are clearly those who stand against you, little church. [18:38] Maybe they say you're hateful or narrow-minded for your commitment to Jesus and His word. Maybe they say they are the ones who truly understand God's love.

Maybe they seem to have the upper hand on you so they get public praise, they assure you that you are on the wrong side of history. Jesus says, I will vindicate you.

In fact, Jesus promises whatever you give up for me in Luke 18, I'll give back many times more.

The prophet Isaiah tells God's people this repeatedly as they go into exile. He says, don't give up.

For example, Isaiah 60 prophesies a day when the glory of the Lord is risen upon His people.

The sons of those who afflicted you shall come bending low to you. And all who despised you shall bow down at your feet. They shall call you the city of the Lord, the Zion of the Holy One of Israel.

[19:47] It sounds like the promise for this church here, doesn't it? Your enemies will acknowledge that your God is the true God, that you are His people, possibly even, as they join you in conversion to Yahweh.

They start following Him with you. Wonderful. They will learn that I have loved you.

Maybe that's not a bad reminder for you either, right? I have loved you. You really have known my love, Jesus says.

Those who were saying, look how weak your little church is, will see that you had power that they never realized. Don't believe, little church, that the difficulty you're experiencing right now means that God does not love you.

Sometimes, because our minds are broken, we interpret it that way, but Jesus wants to remind His most discouraged people of His love. In fact, He wants them to know they'll be protected in trial.

[21:07] Apparently, since it says they have kept His word about patient endurance, they've already faced some stiff opposition, some difficult suffering, but it sounds like there will be more yet to come.

Some think that this reference here is to a specific future tribulation, that Christians will be raptured, taken from the world before it happens so that they don't face it, maybe.

I don't think that's the best understanding of this encouragement here to this church. As John is using the same words from Jesus as He does in His gospel when Jesus prays, remember in John 17, He's on the way to the cross, what does Jesus pray?

Father, don't take them out of the world, but, here's the word, keep them from the evil one. Guard them, not so much from His presence, get them away, get them away, but from His impact.

Keep them safe from His attack against them. Because while you remain here on earth, you're going to face severe trial. Jesus knows that as He's praying for them.

[22:26] He's saying, don't be surprised, don't think I've left you behind. When you endure patiently, trust Me and not your own strength. Jesus says, I'm going to come through for you.

I'm going to protect you from ultimate harm, and I can do it because I've been there. Enduring patiently is something Jesus knows well, so His followers can anticipate walking through it too.

The same word used of Jesus on the cross. Hebrews 12, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross.

And then what happened? He sat down at the right hand of the throne of God, where you, Philadelphian Christians, with little power right now, you will sit there too.

He has endured for you, and He promises to protect you as you keep enduring. So whether you as an individual sufferer, or we as a church, go through a particularly difficult season, Jesus is not notably absent.

[23:46] That's not the explanation. But He's particularly present right then to guard you and to keep you. His strength is perfect, especially when our strength is gone, right?

Don't lose heart. In fact, Jesus says, it's not going to be an unending trial. I am coming soon. Hold fast what you have so that no one may seize your crown.

That's the encouragement of being awarded the victor's crown, right? It's the one you receive at the end of the race. Hold fast what you have. What's that? The good news about Jesus.

In fact, it's Jesus Himself. Maybe you're not getting prizes for your faith today. Nobody is giving you an award, but He certainly will allow you to share in His victory one day, someday. It's coming. If you do hold on, becoming a victor, an overcomer, a conqueror, there's a next promise of encouragement.

[24 : 56] Verse 12, I will make Him a pillar in the temple of my God. Never shall He go out of it. Does your faith feel weak sometimes?

Do you feel unsteady, uncertain, tested by the temptations of the world and you could go either way?

Do you feel the weight of this sense of people with the money have the power? The people who are loved by others have all the power? I don't have anything.

Have you ever thought, maybe I won't be very significant in the long run? Maybe our church won't really have any lasting impact.

Have you stopped to say, what impact really lasts? What does God use to measure significance?

[26 : 00] Listen, the building may blow away in a tornado or crumble in an earthquake, but we, the people, will be a pillar. What is that? The strongest part that stands, the vital part holding up the whole structure, the lasting peace that never leaves.

We're going to be a pillar where? In God's house. Right? Isn't that what he said? The place where God lives. Jesus is saying, did you forget?

Did you forget little fledgling church, you little group of Christ followers that you're being built into a living temple where God dwells?

In that final temple, you'll be a pillar that is never apart from the presence of the glorious God of the universe. How could you be any more significant?

One last word of encouragement. You'll be claimed by God forever. God does. Perhaps no one else wants to be associated with you.

[27 : 09] Perhaps no one else wants you in their city. God does. Notice he's going to name them.

There's a name given three times. Putting your name on something signifies ownership, identity, a claim on someone.

Who do I belong to? Where do I belong? What does he say? You belong to Jesus. You belong in God's city.

You belong in relationship with God. You may have been kicked out of other places. You may have been rejected by other people, but you will be today and always claimed by God himself.

self. Kids, you still listening? Do you remember the young boy Andy in the movie Toy Story?

[28 : 14] And he has a little toy cowboy named Woody. Do you remember Woody? Do you remember what's written on the bottom of Woody's boot? Yeah, some of you did.

Andy, why did he write that? Because Woody was Andy's beloved toy. So Andy wrote his name on Woody, didn't he?

He's Andy's toy. The one Andy loves. It's written there in permanent ink, God says. I will write on the one who has but little power, God.

God's beloved church, God's beloved man or woman or boy or girl. He belongs with Jesus. She is eternally with the king of kings.

His. If that started to sink into your heart that God's name was written on you, how much would that encourage you? Does it encourage Woody?

[29 : 25] Woody is Andy's toy, isn't he? He's a very confident. He's so thankful that Andy loves him.

It just fills him with purpose and significance, doesn't it? Woody's the leader there. What about you? Would it cause your heart to swell with hope and confidence like that?

Imagine that you go to bed discouraged and weak. Maybe you've done that recently. And you wake up and you look in the mirror and you see God has claimed me as his own.

It's still written right here on me. God claims me. I'm his beloved. That's what he's promising to everyone who trusts Jesus.

Just think what it might do. Maybe one day at a time it would help you receive rejection without despair. Not everybody rejects me.

[30 : 39] maybe one person at a time it would help you believe that your ministry to them or your prayers for them might one day bear fruit even when it doesn't look like it.

But God is working through me. Maybe one trial at a time it would help you to endure loss or disappointment or confusion because one thing is abundantly clear. You are God's beloved and he's in charge and whatever you're going through he's holding you and nothing can erase that. Wouldn't it change things for you if that was really true? It is. That's what Jesus wants to happen in our hearts and lives as we read these letters. He wants it to make us completely different. It's like we said at the beginning. Every one of them gives eternal realities that transform how we live now. Eternal perspective that shapes today.

[31 : 45] Eternal light that shines into our darkness so that we can see true reality not all the other stuff that clouds our vision every day. So I wanted to finish here this morning by combining the words to those who overcome.

All seven letters, right? words to those who conquer. Nike. That's the word. That's the Greek. Nike. Not just do it but just trust him. Stick with the conqueror. That's what it's about. Those words from all seven letters come to us because God wins, grace prevails, and Jesus reigns. That's what makes you a conqueror, an overcomer, a victor in revelation. It's that you're connected to him. For you who are clinging to Jesus, that's what he's saying, because Jesus is clinging to you, these are realities to come in fullness one day that have already begun to be true of you.

[32 : 54] I want you to know they're as certain as the fact that you're sitting in these pews right now. They are more real to who you are and what you can expect to come than what you think you're going to eat for lunch or whether you'll wake up alive in this world tomorrow morning. You can count on this more. Now just listen. Close your eyes if you want. Jesus promises the second death will not harm you. You'll live forever. And not just surviving but thriving off the fruit from the tree of life and the hidden manna provided by God himself because he dwells with you, with you and with your brothers and sisters, a pillar in God's temple. In fact, you'll be sharing in his authority on the very throne of heaven with the God of the universe. He says, ruling the nations. You'll be given a white stone with a new name, a shining reputation, a transformed identity. In fact, God's own name written on you because your relationship with him is not merely about presence and power but it's truly about love.

[34 : 16] He loves you so much that Jesus, the King of kings, gives you himself forever, the morning star and the promise of victory, his victory, life with him forever. All of these promises to us. That's just a taste of his glory that will be revealed in us. So that our present sufferings, which are truly bad and painful, are put in perspective. They can't even compare with the glory that will be revealed in us. So that our priorities are reoriented off of finding security and reputation and pleasure here onto something that is more worthwhile, more sure, more fulfilling. That's what he's doing with our priorities. He's giving us a taste of glory so that our fearful, discouraged, self-focused eyes that see our circumstances, that feel small and powerless, that they're turned upward.

[35 : 40] To see our conquering Savior and our wavering hearts are reassured that we're a part of a story that is going somewhere glorious. And we're connected to a king who is truly glorious. Let that eternal reality be the most true and most real, most captivating reality that you live in today. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. Amen. Let's pray. Jesus, indeed, give us ears to hear the beautiful words from you that I can't even describe, but that you, Spirit, can use to encourage our hearts so soften our hearts to receive your love that's better than life and better than we know to understand. That we might then share it with eager lips and lives, that we might actually be your church the way you made us to be for your glory. We need you to do that, Jesus. Jesus. And we look forward to your doing it soon and to your doing it forever because you will make us pure and white and yours forever.

[37 : 13] We give you thanks in your name. Amen. For more information, visit us online at southwood.org.