

Philadelphia

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Preacher: Rev Murdo Alex Macleod

[0 : 0 0] Let us turn now to the Revelation of John, the last book in the Bible, the book of Revelation, chapter 3, reading at verse 7. Revelation chapter 3, verse 7.

And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write, These things saith he that is holy, he that is true, he that is the key of David, he that openeth and no man shutteth, and shutteth and no man openeth.

I know thy works. Behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it. For thou hast a little strength, and hast kept my word, and hast not denied my name.

Behold, I will make them of the synagogue of Satan, which say they are Jews and are not, but do lie. Behold, I will make them to come and worship before thy feet, and to know that I have loved thee.

Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world to try them that dwell upon the earth.

[1 : 1 9] Behold, I come quickly. Hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown. Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and you shall go no more out.

And I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, which is New Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from my God. And I will write upon him my new name.

He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches. Now, continuing your studies, we come to the second last of the messages to the churches in Asia.

This is the message to the church in Philadelphia. Philadelphia. Now, you may know already that Philadelphia means the town or the city as it was then where the church was placed, meant a brotherly love.

It was named after a king who in the old days had shown a particular love for his brother. And it was in that city, named Philadelphia, that the Lord had this church, which was obviously small in number, but nevertheless very effective.

[2 : 5 0] It is the only church apart from Smyrna against which the Lord directs no accusation and lays no blame at their door.

And someone has said that from this we see that it is not the biggest nor the most impressive looking churches, nor those of most and with most prestige, which are necessarily in the best spiritual condition.

This church in Philadelphia was small, but was in a very, very good spiritual condition. And we look at this message in the same way as we have looked at the other messages, follow the same pattern.

We look first of all at the way in which our Lord designates himself in verse 7. Then we look at the condition of the church as it was known to him, unerringly known, verses 8 and 10.

We look at the rewards which he gives to the church as a consequence of our condition. And then the church's security, the church's responsibility, and finally the church's promise.

[4 : 12] First of all then, the self-designation of Christ. He speaks of himself in verse 7 as, He that is holy, he that is true, and he that hath the key of David.

Now, when you've noticed this, I've said it repeatedly in the course of these studies, that the way in which our Lord designates himself, and there is a self-designation of our Lord in every single message here to each church, the way in which our Lord designates himself is closely related to the condition in which the church was, or related to the needs of the church addressed.

And here, when he speaks of himself as being holy and true and having the key of David, we are to understand several things which were meant to encourage this church in her situation.

You know that when someone speaks to you, if someone was going to give you some counsel, some advice, I suppose that your response to that advice would depend very much on your attitude to that person's character.

If, for example, a man was giving you advice, and he himself didn't live according to the advice that was given to you, you wouldn't lay much store, you wouldn't place much emphasis on what was said to you.

[5 : 55] But if what he says is backed up by a character which is consistent with that advice or with that counsel, then you will tend to listen to that individual.

And our Lord here, having revealed himself to John in his exalted position as the mediator of the church, reigning as her king and proceeding eternally on her behalf, reminds her that he is holy.

Now, if you just stop there for a moment and look at that term itself, I suppose that it means so much that you would have difficulty in knowing where to start, to explain the meaning of holy.

Whatever else is true, for example, of God, we know that he is holy. And what we generally understand by that is this, that he is absolutely perfect.

It is one of the qualities, or perhaps the quality of God, that separates him from all other beings. The separateness of God is brought before us constantly in the Bible by the term holy.

[7 : 21] And that is why, for example, he that is holy demands of his people that they too be holy. Because he wants them to be what he is himself.

He wants them to be holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sin. Now, here is the person who is holy, speaking to our church, and reminding her that he knows her condition.

And reminding her that he is unerring in his estimate of her condition. That is born out by the second term which uses himself, he that is true.

When he says something, he and he alone speaks infallibly. He and he alone is capable of this unerring assessment.

He cannot make any mistakes when he speaks. He is true, absolutely. As he is absolutely holy, so he is absolutely true.

[8 : 36] And then he says of himself that he has the key of the house of David. Now, we read a chapter there today, or at least a part of a chapter, which brings before us something of the meaning of this term.

The house of David, of course, was one of the ways which the Bible speaks of the nation of Israel. David was the king of Israel. And as king, he had complete control over his own house and over his own nation.

That's what the key of the house of David means. One who has absolute authority over the affairs of his own kingdom or the affairs of his own house.

And our Lord Jesus Christ, exalted tonight in glory, has absolute authority. He has the highest possible power and authority as the glorified mediator over his own church in the world.

You remember what he said before he ascended, when he commissioned the disciples to go out with the gospel, the words of the great commission. All power is given unto me in heaven and on earth.

[9 : 59] Go ye therefore. There he was as a church's supreme head ordering the affairs of his own kingdom.

He rules over it. And therefore he goes on to say, He that openeth and no man shuts. And he shuts and no man opens.

This, as we saw in the words of Jesus to Peter, read in Matthew chapter 16, means that the authority and the discipline which he exercises over his church is supreme.

He and he alone admits people into his church. It's a spiritual transaction by which people are brought into the church of Jesus Christ.

And I hope you understand this, that by church, I don't mean a building. I mean people. Those who are saved by his grace. And he himself has laid down the rule of admission into that institution, into his church.

[11 : 08] Except a man be born again. He cannot enter the kingdom of God. That's not the words of a church or the words of a bishop or of a minister.

These are the words of the Lord Jesus Christ. These are the terms of admission into his church. And he and he alone has absolute authority to exclude from his church or to dismiss from his church.

And really the terms speak quite simply, as I said already, of the supreme authority which rests in his hand as king over his own church.

And if any words ever run throughout the corridors of power in the nation of Scotland, it was these words, no king but Jesus.

And that's exactly the emphasis that is placed here. Now that's the way in which he designates himself. And as an exalted, glorified, reigning monarch, he speaks and he says this, I know thy works.

[12 : 31] I have set before thee an open door and no man can shut it. Now again, I hope we've come to grips with the meaning of this word, I know thy works.

It speaks of what is outward and what is inward. What a person does, what is seen, but also the motives and the principles behind what he does.

That's what works means. The character that a person or a group of people form as it expresses itself outwardly and as it is known inwardly by God.

I know thy works. His infallible knowledge. what he says of it is this, I know, as we read in verse 10, I know that, verse 8, I know that you have added to strength and I know that you have kept my word, the word of my patience and I know that there was not denied my name.

Now this is what he knew, this is the condition of the church. she had, first of all, little strength. Now this can mean two things. It can mean that the church was numerically very small and therefore lacking in influence in that big city.

[14 : 06] You know it's huge cities. You can have a very small church which can be functioning very effectively Godward, but as far as the overall situation the city is concerned may have little or no voice at all in the running of the affairs of that city.

So it may mean that this church was a small in number but it also has a spiritual connotation.

Thou hast little strength. and I think that this is the picture the Bible gives us of a church or a Christian in the way that he or they ought to function.

You see one of the classic descriptions of the Christian churches found in Isaiah chapter 40 and this is what he says of it I will give power to the faint and to them who have no might I will increase strength and what you have there is this a picture of a church which in its own estimate has little or no strength a church which is aware of its own weakness has a deep deep sense of its own weakness it is a felt sense of its own weakness but notice in its weakness it is united to the power and to the strength of Jehovah I will increase might I will give strength of the same picture in Zechariah not by might nor by power but by my spirit saith the

Lord the church is to make use of all the resources at her disposal all the gifts that God has given to her by all means make use of the gifts make use of all the resources pull them together but her strength lies not in her resources not in her own God given wisdom but in the strength that God has at her disposal the same applies to you and to me you look at this at the individual level here tonight your strength lies not in any in any gifts that God has bestowed upon you though you should thank them for them but in the strength that is available for you in God if any man ever learned that it was the apostle Paul to whom God said this my strength is made perfect in your weakness and my grace is sufficient for you and this church had kept his word or as it describes in verse 10 the word of my patience now this is just one of the other examples in the

[17 : 17] Bible by which the gospel is understood this is the term that is given of the gospel it is the word of God patience now what does that mean well it means this you know that at the heart of the gospel you and I were I remember a minister once telling me that he was traveling from Stornoway to Glasgow by air and a young intelligent man from the island sat beside him the young man wasn't a member of the church he wasn't a professing Christian at all and they got talking and they got talking about the gospel is at the heart of the gospel what is the gospel all about and he said we had landed in Glasgow and he still wasn't able to explain what was at the heart of the gospel what is at the heart of the gospel at the very heart of the gospel is this God's provision for a lost world in

Christ Jesus God sent his son into the world to redeem the world other God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son that whosoever believes in him should not perish that's what the gospel is all about the old testament leads up to that great event and the epistles and the letters flow out from that great event and we are here tonight because Christ died nearly 2000 years ago at Calvary now in his life Christ manifested patience patience means enduring hardship in the face of obstacles and difficulties in the field of conflict going on and keeping going on though the way is rough enduring the cross that he might wear the crown that's patience enduring in the face of all the difficulties and the word the gospel presents

Christ to us not only as our saviour but as our example and we are to follow his example and we too are to become patient we too are to endure hardship in the face of difficulties and this church had kept that word it had believed it it had obeyed it embraced it and held on to it in the face of all these difficulties and also it hadn't denied the name of Christ the name of Christ is the revelation that he's given of himself as our teacher as our prophet and our king our priest our mediator our saviour she had held on to all that she believed and she hadn't turned away from it she hadn't denied the name of her saviour you know when a person denies

Christ what he's doing is this he is failing to stand up beside the things that he or she himself has professed to be true and because of shame or some other reason because pressures are brought to bear upon them they turn away from these things that's denying this church had refused to deny her lord consequently thirdly the lord was giving her this reward verse 8 behold I have set before the unopened door and no man can shut it now this was reward now you know you know that all the doors are there for two purposes it is there either to let someone come in or else to allow people to go out and as you follow through the message to this church you will find that there may be a suggestion here that the open door was there so that the church so that the members were allowed a way of escape because there was going to come great trial and tribulation upon this church a time of persecution was going to break out on this church and you know that one of the promises that we have in the

Bible is that with every temptation God will make a way of escape he always opens a door of escape for his people from things that would otherwise crush their spirit he doesn't give them immunity from all trial and all temptation but he gives them a way out as it were but this door isn't to be understood in that way it's not that the church was given a way out of her problems or a way out of her difficulties rather it was a door of opportunity that he was going to open to her she had a little strength she depended upon him she believed the gospel she did not deny his name and therefore he was going to give her added opportunity for effective work effective witness and youthfulness in her community you know that paul spoke of this a great door has been opened unto me in

[23 : 11] Asia a door of utterance has been opened unto me and he asked the church to pray that a door of utterance would be given unto him in another place so that he would make contact with people with the gospel and this is what this church this is the reward that he gave her he gave her opportunity to go out in the face of difficulties when I open he says no man shall shut it people are going to try and spoil her effectiveness but they're going to fail as they tried with Jesus himself and was said of him no weapon that is formed against thee will prosper so it is said of the Christian church when the Lord opens doors of opportunity and usefulness and service nothing will thwart my purpose on your behalf it has always been the case that people have tried to destroy the gospel that's one of the pictures we have in psalm 2 it's one of the great lessons that come to us from the providence of

Paul who was imprisoned for two years and ultimately martyred for the gospel but what did he say the word of God is not bound and here was this door of effective witness opened up to this church now I think myself and I'm sure that many will agree with this I can't see how anybody would disagree with it this is the problem with us in the island of Lewis at the present time maybe it is the case that doors of effective witness and usefulness are not being opened I don't know but it may also be the case that doors of effective usefulness are being opened and if you think of yourself as a

Christian here tonight as a member of the Christian church I think that if you cast a look at your own life and your own providence you I'm sure will have discovered that God has given you many opportunities for effective witness and work in his name if you are in your place a Christian a day cannot pass I'm sure without God opening some door for you to become effective the question is are you that's a question for me as well and together with that he gave the church this promise and it's a wonderful promise I will make them he says in verse 9 of the synagogue of Satan which say they are Jews and are not but to lie behold

I will make them to come and worship before thy feet and to know that I have loved thee now we've dealt with this the Jewish problem already in this study these are people who claim to be Jews but they weren't real Jews at all and what you have here is a promise that either they would come as converts to join the church or else that they would come to respect and acknowledge and even admire the church now I prefer to take the first point the first interpretation of it that it means that as a result of this church's witness that these people are going to come and submit in worship to the Lord within the church and acknowledge their own unfitness and unworthiness as the very least of the saints of God within the church of

Christ it's one of the great promises of the old testament to Jesus that a nation that you come and worship that sons and born would come and worship the Bible is littered with promises given to Christ that as a result of his work and flowing from the preaching of the gospel and the witness of his own church in the world that many people who were his enemies would become his friends and that is what you have here and that they would come to see how much God loved the church from all eternity that they would come to see the provision that God has made for his church and come to see the wonder of God's preserving grace in the church and over the church and if you don't accept that interpretation I would ask you one question if you are a Christian here tonight what were you before you became a

[28 : 31] Christian but an enemy of Christ what were you but someone who was outwith the church of Jesus Christ what were you but someone who had little or no knowledge of God's love for his own people from all eternity and how did you come into the church of Christ but in some way through the witness of the church of Christ in some way did you not see when God began to deal evocationsly with your heart did you not see the honoured place that the church of Jesus Christ had in the thought of God himself but that's another field for development we go on now to discuss fourthly the church's security because thou hast kept the word of my patience because you have honoured the gospel

I will keep you from the out of temptation which have come upon all the world to try them that dwell upon the earth behold I come quickly I know I mentioned this already this may refer to the persecution that was going to break out upon the church then or it may be a reference to the persecution that was going to break out upon the church of Christ before Jesus comes a second time I'm not very sure when he speaks behold I come quickly it may refer to his coming in that kind of providence or it may refer to his coming with special sustaining grace in that providence or it may refer to his second coming as I've indicated but the point is this that however or whenever God comes that he will always be there to sustain and to preserve his own church as I've said earlier the church is not immune to suffering in the world because the picture you have very often in the

Bible of the church is this that she is a body of people that are being delivered out of suffering the troubles that afflict the just in number many be but yet at length out of them all the Lord has set them free who are these said John in Revelation when he saw that mighty throng clothed in white robes who are they and he was given this answer they who came out of great tribulation and washed their open with them quite in the blood of the Lamb the church is seen coming out coming up from the wilderness leaning upon the arm of her beloved the church has problems has difficulties is persecuted but is kept in all these situations by the power of God that's a security but fifthly she has also our responsibility even as she is being kept hold fast that which thou hast that no man take thy crown ah you see it's wonderful to know that those who are saved by his grace are kept by his power but you remember this that you who are kept also have a responsibility and your responsibility is to hold fast to what you have and what do you have he has given you the gospel what you profess are the truths of the gospel hold these things fast that's where you are to live day by day and you are to persevere to the end so that you may obtain the crown and if you don't persevere you will lose it that's the point that he has here ah you say to me once in

Christ always in Christ and I agree with you that is very true but those who are in Christ have a responsibility towards Christ and the only assurance that you can have tonight that you are in Christ is that you persevere in holding on to what Christ has given to you I wouldn't lay much store by someone who would come up to me and say oh I am a Christian I profess I was converted 20 years ago I wouldn't lay much stress on that if his life doesn't bear out the profession that he made keep on living the way you ought to be otherwise and I don't need to finish a sentence that's your responsibility to not a Christian you are to hold on fast to what God has given and then comes finally this glorious promise to the church that we have in verse 3 him that overcometh see the picture again the

Christian in conflict in the face of difficulties and problems overcoming conquering every day until the day dawn when he will have triumphed in the final battle and the victory the war is won what is the promise then I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God and he shall go no more out that's the first promise now this surely means if you can think well look at the church here tonight the building you and I are in we've got pillars here something similar to a at least in design to what they had in the temple in later rather and the pillar is there as a support it's a very important part of this church without these pillars we'd have no gallery the pillars are necessary to support the building and you know that every

[35 : 00] Christian when he speaks of a pillar in the temple of my God that's just language used again of the church of Jesus Christ the temple of my God the church those who are believers in the Lord Jesus Christ and the church is pictured in heaven like a temple like a building and every member in it is a pillar every member has a part to play and an important part to play that's the wonder of the grace of God that any one of us should have an important part in his church and every member has and will have and it is also there for adornment you know that when this church was painted I wasn't here but I'm sure that those who are deacons here will remember this and perhaps even those who painted it that the pillars were a very important part in that design when the design was drawn up that the pillars formed a very important part of that program they were there to adorn this building and they do and every member of the church of

Jesus Christ adorns his church his church and this is the promise you will be a pillar and you shall go no more out in other words you will have a permanent place in the church of Jesus Christ but you say to me is it not the case that every Christian has a permanent place anyway in the church of Jesus Christ and I say to you yes it is the case but in this world you see the Christian is subject to what you might call fluctuations of movement or perhaps even some people call it moods it depends you know that someday you feel on top of the mountain other days you're in the depth of despair you have your ups and your downs as we sang here tonight in psalm 107 that's a classic picture of the fluctuating situation that the church has in this world going to and fro moving around depends on the experience that you have perhaps this morning you felt great as a believer tonight you don't feel like that at all things have got on top of you but you see in heaven there'd be no such movement there'd be no such fluctuations because all the things that move you today will have come to an end move you as it were that tend to move you from your foundation and here you have a picture of permanence a picture of importance a picture of beauty a picture of adornment a picture of stability when there'd be no more of this so they you know that the the psalm we sang here tonight psalm 107 picture the church of god delivered from from the slavery of egypt and moving through the wilderness finding no city in which to rest but in eternity it will be perfect bliss and perfect rest unbroken fellowship in the presence of god and then there's this final promise i will write upon him three names the name of my god the name of the city of my god and my new name notice jesus who is speaking exalted as he is at the right hand of god the father in heaven and he gives the church this threefold promise i will write upon you now again this is figurative language symbolical language rather and we are meant to understand from that that whatever if something was written on a pillar or anything else in those days it signified to whom that pillar or that thing belonged perhaps you got a book you children here today you get a book your own book and if you want to keep that book the thing you should do is to write your name in it some of us have lost many books because we didn't write our names in them if you write your name it tells the person who the book belongs to and that's what this means you will know he says to every member of the christian church in heaven you will know who you belong to because it will have written on you the name of my god and you remember this this is god jesus in our nature god in our nature you're our mediator speaking of my god you could only say it in our nature my god and you will know that you belong to my god he will be your god ah you say he's my god tonight i know but i also

know this if i know anything at all of the human heart that there are times when you're not as sure as you are tonight that god is your god but one day you will be so assured that nothing will ever break in to break that assurance you will have the assurance of knowing that you are his you belong to him to jesus god and i will write also upon you he says the name of my new jerusalem the name of the city of my god the new jerusalem which comes down out of heaven from god or from my god now again this is just this is just the name that the bible uses for the church of jesus christ zion or jerusalem which is from abba and what this means is this that every person who gets into heaven will know that he belongs to that community which is in heaven will belong to the citizens of heaven to the kingdom of heaven to the church of jesus christ as he will bear all the characteristics of god the name of god so he will bear all the characteristics of the church of god everything that is true of those for whom jesus died everything that characterizes them as his will be true of all the people of god in heaven now again you say to me here tonight but i know that i'm a christian i know that i belong to the church of jesus christ that's wonderful but again i say to you that there may be seasons there may be occasions when your assurance is not as strong as it may be tonight and that because of the circumstance in which you find yourself you remember this a greater than you was subjected to this temptation if you are the son of god prove it and i've no doubt that christians here tonight know what i'm talking about that they have found themselves in a situation where they were made to doubt the reality of their belonging to the church of jesus christ but in heaven the assurance will be there eternally you will have written upon you all the characteristics of the church of jesus christ which came from heaven which had its origin in heaven born born by the power of the grace of god from heaven above as he said to nicodemus unless you are born from above you cannot belong to this kingdom and you will have all the qualities of the church and finally i will write upon him my new name again they will bear the characteristics of christ and they will have the assurance that they are his but notice this oh you know that someone said this to me recently but i can't help doing this if you bear with me for a minute i will try and say something some people may say well a sabbath evening sermon in storn all about the christians well my friend i i accept that and and i feel for you

if that is your reaction here tonight but bear with me for a minute because i have something to say to you before this sermon closes in a minute i want to apply this to some of you whom i saw last night but wait a minute and i'll be with you the the name of of my new name my new name that means that the name of christ is the the revelation that he has given of himself but i think that the word new here suggests to us that there are things concerning the glory of the risen christ which none of us have yet as yet seen no one has yet seen this but the day is going to come when all those who love the lord and who are going to be in heaven with the lord will have all these characteristics which he has tonight glorified in the presence of god and unseen by you as yet you will bear and not only will you bear it as a means of blessedness to yourself but you will be with a company who will see in you the glory of christ revealed and who will admire not you but who will admire christ in you throughout the ages of all eternity remember how paul put it right into the thessalonians christ he says will be admired in you all in that day that is the wonderful promise that he gives the church and he all closes by saying he that hath an ear let him hear what the spirit says unto the churches now you have ears here tonight every one of you whether you're a christian or not and god bids you listen to this if you have ears at all listen to this and what he's saying to you surely is this if there is any life that can be commended on the face of this earth it is a life of faith in jesus christ and the life hereafter that can be commended is the life that is going to be enjoyed in the presence of christ with all those who will bear his image perfectly before the throne of god on that day and you ask me now what bearing has that got on you here tonight not a christian well my friend i will say this to you may i commend the church of jesus christ to you and her fellowship more than the stinking barge of this town we have heard a lot in recent days of the way in which anti-social behaviour is becoming almost commonplace in this town i don't blame the people of this town or the young of this town for all of that hordes of people come into this town out with the town from out with the town on a friday and a saturday night but it appalls me to see people who belong to this congregation and youngsters and youngsters from this congregation in some sad sad circumstances in this town i don't blame them altogether i blame the homes

from which they come for a lot of the problems that exist in this town and it's high time that you who are here tonight as parents accepted your responsibilities and faced up to the facts that those who are in their early teens have no right to be where they are seen in this town on some eight nights they ought to be where you are and i will be the first to acknowledge the problem that you have in bringing up teenagers in this day and this generation and those who are in place of responsibility in the town and in education i believe ought to exercise similar discipline within these institutions on youngsters who are besmirching the name of this town by their behaviour and that is why i commend the gospel of the grace of god to you tonight as a teenager and as a parent what a transformation this town would see if you would come in obedience to the claims of christ to his feet if you would associate yourself with the gospel and with his church and with the church with his house and with his day instead of selling your soul for a mess of pottage and what will your reward be at the end of the day and if you come back to the promise that he gives this church a promise of bliss blessedness contentment in heaven above is that not a life worth living for is that not an end worth hoping for and looking to and longing for instead of as i said earlier giving yourself for what i commended my friend again as something worth giving attention to and something worth having something worth clinging on to hold fast to it lest someone else take your crown let us pray willaccept who i do if you want to just pour who good do

[51 : 17] Ooo pot way may like will support my too I love things can who can or