

Revelation 3:7-13

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[0 : 00] This one trick will cut your mortgage payment in half.

Six easy exercises for burning off that belly. Twelve tips for looking great for bikini season this summer. If you are an astute cultural observer, you will recognize that sentences like this come from that great and sophisticated genre of magazines that hang out by the checkout aisle in the grocery store.

And they make these strange promises. And perhaps you, like me, are confused that anyone actually buys these documents. But if we stop for a moment to consider why people might actually buy these things, I think we might notice that what's being sold is a solution to some perceived problem.

You see, we think we have a problem. We're not quite sure what the problem is. But we have this nagging intuition that something is wrong. And here is an almanac, a solution for whatever problem ails us.

Usually it's too large a stomach or too boring a sex life or too empty a bank account. When was the last time you walked up to one such rack of magazines and saw there in all caps blazing in front of you, do the same thing you're doing now?

[1 : 59] That would be strange. It would be counterintuitive. You would have very little desire to buy this document in front of you.

After all, all you have to do is keep doing what you're doing. In fact, that might sit strangely with us, we Americans, who think that to be an American is to take yourself into your own hands and to create yourself however you desire yourself, always improving, taking more classes, taking more exercises, learning more things.

But the message of Jesus tonight to the Church of the Philadelphians is precisely this strange one. Keep doing what you're doing.

And to help us make sense of that claim, that desire Jesus has for His church, let's look there in Revelation chapter 3.

Revelation chapter 3, verses 7 through 13. If you remember in context, this is Jesus, having appeared after His resurrection, many decades after His resurrection, to John, the beloved apostle who is in exile on the island of Patmos.

[3 : 29] John has this vision, and in this vision, Christ comes and says to him this, Revelation 3, 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.

[5 : 03] Never shall he go out of it. And I will write on him the name of my God, 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 to hear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. Let's pray briefly. Lord, your desire that you spoke to John is that your people would have ears, that they would hear.

I pray that we would have ears and would hear tonight, Lord. Speak to us from this passage. Encourage our weary souls. Cause us to love you more. And allow the words of my mouth and the meditations of our heart to be acceptable in your sight, O Lord. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen. If you've been joining us here in the evening service at Trinity over the last few weeks, you'll know that this is our current sermon series. There are seven brief letters, the beginning of Revelation, to seven different churches in the continent, the subcontinent of Asia Minor, which is now Turkey. This is the sixth one. [6:18] Of those seven, Jesus says a mix of good and bad things to four different churches. He says only good things to two churches, of which Philadelphia is one.

He says only bad things to one church, which is Laodicea, which is next week. So if this sermon doesn't have enough fire and brimstone for you, come back next week for Laodicea. From this text tonight, I hope we can learn and be encouraged by three things. First, the situation of the Philadelphians.

The situation of the Philadelphians. Second, the beautiful reasons and rewards for patient endurance. Third, the application to Trinity Baptist Church. So first, the situation of the Philadelphians. Philadelphia was a relatively small city that received its name, which means brotherly love, just like the city in Pennsylvania does. [7:30] There are some stories that go back and forth. Essentially, one is that the older brother, the more powerful one, was rumored to be assassinated.

And many people pressured the younger brother to take his place, to steal a throne from him. And the younger brother said, no, I'm far too loyal to my brother. And once the older brother was seen to be alive, the younger brother was vindicated and given this city named the city of brotherly love. It was probably the youngest of all the seven cities mentioned in this section of Revelation. Its church was probably the newest. And it was one of the smaller churches to which this book of Revelation is addressed.

In AD 17, about 70 years before this letter was written, a large earthquake destroyed most of this city. And from this text, we learn that there was likely an important and influential synagogue in the city of Philadelphia that was strongly opposing the work of the Christians there. Perhaps some of the Christians were former members of the synagogue who had converted to Christianity and subsequently been excommunicated from the synagogue. It seems that this Jewish opposition is the greatest trial faced by the church in Philadelphia.

[9:03] Given how vehement John's language is about them. Look, he calls them in verse 9, the synagogue of Satan. The strong words. And given how much time John spends urging the Christians in Philadelphia to endure and stand fast in the face of that opposition.

This was a beleaguered church. They were under opposition. Still, as I mentioned, in spite of all this opposition, Jesus has only good things to say about this church.

Small, relatively weak, and oppressed though it was. This church was no Antioch or Rome. In fact, I think many of them were probably quite surprised to receive this letter from Jesus himself.

In terms of strategy, this might not be the city, the church that you're most interested in appealing to. But from that point, I think we should take great encouragement.

From this brief message to the Philadelphians, I think we can learn that God does not overlook even the smallest faithfulnesses of his people.

[10:20] Notice, the Philadelphians are not commended for taking the gospel to all of Asia. For having many teachers in their midst. For taking up huge collection of offerings.

Or any such accomplishment like that. No. The Philadelphians are commended because they have kept Jesus' word and not denied his name.

They have kept on. They have endured. They have stood in the day of opposition. And for this, they were commended.

We are right, I think, to have high and lofty ambitions for God to use our own lives powerfully. That's a good ambition that we ought to have. But perhaps your life situation does not look promising for the conversion of entire nations.

[11:19] Taking the gospel to some unreached people. The writing of great books about God. The sacrifice of incredible things for his glory. Perhaps your life looks like a fairly normal Christian life.

Don't be discouraged. Let the letter to Philadelphia remind you that every diaper change in the middle of the night for a screaming baby performed with a whispered prayer for that child is noticed

by the Lord.

Every Sunday school lesson taught to children and then forgotten almost immediately is remembered by the Lord. Every time of prayer of raising up your children or your friends or your neighbors or sharing the gospel with them that seem to bear no fruit whatsoever is noticed by God. He notices the smallest things of our lives. Every small act of kindness and mercy done without any audience is known to God himself.

He sees your work. He knows your works, he says to the Philadelphians. He says this also to us. I know your works. Though you are small, yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name. [12:52] This is encouragement for us. The Proverbs say that the eyes of the Lord are in every place, keeping watch on the evil and the good, observing, not missing anything.

Remember how Jesus was the only one in the temple courts who noticed the widow offering her two small mites. It was Jesus alone who saw that.

And Jesus praised her. So it is with Philadelphia. So it is with us. Jesus casts his eye upon the otherwise unimportant church of Philadelphia and encourages them to stand.

This is the situation of the Philadelphians. Secondly, we see from this text the beautiful reasons and rewards of patient endurance.

Quite simply, the reason and reward of patient endurance under opposition is nothing other than the person and the work of Jesus.

[14:01] He is introduced here, speaking of himself, as the Holy One, the True One, as one who is trustworthy because he cannot deceive.

And because he is trustworthy, his promises can be believed. He has, it says, the key of David, who opens and no one shuts, who shuts and no one opens.

You see, this introduction of Jesus is the foundation for all that follows in the rest of this passage.

He is holy and true. He is trustworthy and faithful.

And he has power to open and shut. And no one can stand against him. Christ is the True One, not the opponents of the church who say they are Jews but lie.

Jesus is the true obedient One of God, the true Jew, the true Lamb of God that follows the law of God in every detail. Because he is this holy and true One, it is to him whom the Philadelphians must cling with all of their energy, no matter the opposition.

[15:12] The reward for standing fast in the face of opposition is Jesus himself. The reason for standing fast in the face of opposition is Jesus himself.

And notice that the opposition against the Philadelphians is precisely because they are being obedient to Christ. It is not in the way of disobedience that they have encountered hardship, no, but in the way of obedience.

Like Job in the Old Testament, their trial cannot be attributed to their own specific sins. Rather, hostility is the price of following Christ in a fallen world.

Hostility is the price of following Christ in a fallen world. This has always been the condition of God's church to more or less degrees in one place or another since the resurrection and the ascension of Christ.

This is just what Christians do. We bear witness in obedience to Christ and we face opposition for it. We cannot put our final hope in any city, in any nation, in any government, or any administration to protect and care for the church, for us individually or collectively.

[16:43] No. The book of Hebrews tells us that here we have no lasting city. Meaning that this world cannot hold the weight of our hope.

We yearn for something in the deepest parts of our soul that this world is not equipped to give us. Therefore, let's place that hope in a more sure foundation.

Place it in the solid rock of Christ. Again, there in Hebrews, it says that the exiles, the pilgrims, the wanderers looked for a city with foundations whose builder and maker is God.

This foundation is a theme that's used to describe Christ. The stone that builders have rejected has become the cornerstone, the most important stone in the entire edifice.

He is the foundation of the eternal city of God. Do you notice from this passage where the city of God comes from? Look there in verse 12. The new Jerusalem.

[17:48] It comes down from God out of heaven. It's not achieved by voting the correct political party into office, by writing the wisest constitution, by having the best social welfare programs.

We should strive for all of those things. All the while remembering that here we have no lasting city. And the new Jerusalem comes down from God out of heaven.

This is where we should put our deepest yearnings. And it's toward that vision that John points the Philadelphians. You see, governments and armies can rage and have raged and will rage against the church.

And society and elites can scorn and have scorned and will scorn her for her strange behavior in the way of obedience.

But Christ remains still a solid rock. On Christ the solid rock I stand. All other ground, all other ground is sinking sand.

[19 : 03] If all men therefore rise in opposition to you, but Christ takes up your cause, you cannot fail, but you will overcome.

And if throngs of men rally around you to sing your praise, yet Christ takes his stand against you, then heaven and earth will pass away before you make one inch of progress against the Lord's anointed one.

He is the one who opens and no one shuts. He is the one who shuts and no one opens. Christ, you see, is the only indispensable ally for the Christian in all of the world.

May the shifting of society around us give us ample occasion to reflect on the steadfastness of Christ. Look also at the way Jesus shows himself to meet precisely the needs of the Christians there in Philadelphia.

Consider their circumstance. As I said, it's quite likely that they have been excommunicated from synagogues for their faith in Christ. If they were to go to the homes, businesses, and synagogues of those who were once their friends, perhaps even their family, they would meet nothing but closed doors.

[20 : 29] bolted against their entrance. You're no longer welcome here. You cannot access this. So Christ introduces himself by saying that he is the one who has the key of David, who opens and no one will shut, who shuts and no one opens.

Immediately after this, he says that he has set before the Philadelphians an open door which no one is able to shut. What a beautiful reversal. In Christ, all doors are open, though on earth they seem barred and slammed in your face.

In Philadelphians, you see, Christ says, have not really been shut out of any important assemblies. For Christ has opened to them every door.

This is the conviction that allows the Philadelphians in the words of Martin Luther to let good and kindred go this mortal life also. In Christ, we lose nothing.

He is the one who opens and no one can shut. Consider the example of David Livingstone. A missionary who left the comforts of England to preach the gospel in the interior of Africa where he finally died.

[21 : 56] It's an amazing story. I commend you to read it. When asked by several Cambridge students about the sacrifices he was making in going over to Africa for the advance of Christ's kingdom, Livingstone said this, for my own part, I have never ceased to rejoice that God has appointed me to such an office.

People talk of the sacrifice I have made in spending so much of my life in Africa. But is that a sacrifice which brings its own blessed reward in healthful activity, the consciousness of doing good, peace of mind, and a bright hope of a glorious destiny hereafter?

It is emphatically no sacrifice. Say rather that it is a privilege. Anxiety, sickness, suffering, or danger now and then with the foregoing of the common conveniences and charities of this life may make us pause and cause the spirit to waver and the soul to sink.

But let this be but for a moment. All these are nothing when compared with the glory which shall be revealed in and for us.

I never made a sacrifice. Doesn't that stir you? A man who dies in the interior of Africa for the advance of the gospel says, I never made a sacrifice.

[23 : 35] Have you known Christ to be sweet in this way? To be valuable and precious in this way? So that the giving up of all the world for him would be for you an easy choice?

If not, meditate upon the way that Christ here suits the needs of the Philadelphians. he introduces himself in ways that precisely target their needs.

Which of Christ's names and titles targets the need in your heart? Perhaps it's for one who will be to you a father as God introduces himself in the Lord's prayer our father.

perhaps yours has been a life of loneliness and so he says to you no longer do I call you slaves I call you friends.

Perhaps the world around you seems to lack any steadfastness to be at every moment full of anxiety and Christ says that he is a rock he is one who provides for his people even in the wilderness.

[25 : 02] For Christ to be sweet to us I think we must meditate on the nature of our needs and the names he gives to himself to meet those needs.

it seems the Philadelphians saw Christ in this way. The Philadelphians knew it seems that to be a Christian is to gain the whole world as an enemy temporarily and to gain the whole world as a trophy eternally.

To be a Christian is to trade two widow's mites for a pearl of great price. There is you see no good thing that Christ will withhold from those who love him from those who patiently endure in their faithfulness no matter how small or great it may be.

These are the promises of Christ that he makes here and I remind you that they are not for grand displays of faithfulness they are for the daily endurance under difficulty.

the promises Christ makes here are not only of himself but they are promises of access access to his very presence which no one will take from him.

[26 : 19] Consider this promise in verse 12 the one who conquers I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God never shall he go out of it. By the writing of this text the temple in Jerusalem had already been destroyed and that produced a serious theological problem for how the Jews were going to meet with and experience God.

In response to this theological problem Jesus says that the access of the Philadelphians to the inner sanctuary of God is as permanent as the very pillars of the temple themselves.

The Jews attempt to kick you out of their synagogues no one can kick out the pillars from the temple and you shall be as a pillar in the temple of my God.

Not only permanence and presence but God also makes promises of possession. Look here in verse 12. 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 of my own new name.

Jesus desires to claim those for his own who endure faithfully. He gives us the reasons and the rationale and he says on top of it all I desire for you to be my own.

[27 : 39] I desire for you to bear my name. And for those who bear the name of Christ that name is like a passport into the very inner courts of intimacy with God himself.

This is the promise of possession, of presence, of permanence. how do we know this promise shall appeal to us?

Because the Philadelphians stand firm in heeding the words of Jesus. Which I think is what is meant by verse 10. You have kept my word about patient endurance. They have heard the voice of Jesus, the word of the Lord, endure, and they have obeyed it.

They have done it. And this is the grounds for thinking that they will access and they will benefit from all of these glories of Christ. Because Christ is the one who opens doors and no one can shut them, who shuts doors and no one can open them, then it follows that Christ alone is the one whose word we must heed.

He is our only ally. His is the voice we must hear. The church as the bride of Christ and we as individual members of it all have the single great need of listening to and obeying the one voice of Christ.

[28 : 55] It is the greatest need of our lives. The church at its best has done precisely this. It was Luther's conviction and dogmatic desire to hear the very voice of Jesus and to heed that voice alone which enacted a recovery and a recentering on scriptural doctrines that had been confused.

And hundreds of years later when Hitler attempted to take over the German church to support his political agenda, Karl Barth and the German confessing church opposed his attempts. In the Barman Declaration, their manifesto against Hitler's church, his claim to have control over the church, they wrote that, quote, Jesus Christ, as he is attested to us in holy scripture, is the one word of God whom we have to hear and whom we have to trust and obey in life and death.

So it was for the Philadelphians in 90 AD, so it was for the Germans in 1930, so it was for us in New Haven in 2015.

We need to hear the very word of God. And this then is the conclusion of the second point, the rationale and the rewards for patient endurance.

It takes us to our final third point for the evening, briefly, the application of this text to Trinity Baptist. I've already made plenty of applications, and I hope you see that this text has something for us now.

[30 : 30] I want to hearken back to this point about the church not being chastised, not being warned against its evils, but of being commended for its strengths.

If God were to write such a letter of commendation to the church at New Haven called Trinity Baptist, what good things would he find in us?

I think there are many. I think there are many ways in which I see daily faithfulness, both from the elders of this church and for the people who sit in the pews like myself.

I said here that it is the one great need of us to hear the very words of God, to understand the word of God, and that is what the elders of this church desire to do for us.

I said that God does not think it too small a thing to look at the small deeds of faithfulness that the Philadelphians do. I think we should cultivate that same sense.

[31 : 36] So, consider where have you seen faithful endurance in this church, in the people around you, in the people in the pews, in the elders.

The word is preached faithfully from this pulpit week after week. This morning we commissioned our first church plant. The church is making disciples.

Who do you see in this church who's doing that good work? Find them and encourage them.

Commend them the way Jesus does with the Philadelphians here.

Do you know that those who labor for the ministry of the word can often get discouraged? Do you know that those who are most encouraging toward others often fall through the cracks because there's no one to encourage them?

Find the people around you who you see to be faithful in the work of the Lord and encourage them this week. Start small this week. I'd say do it once a day.

[32 : 37] An email, a text message, a slap on the back even before we leave the church tonight.

Encourage people, encourage your fellow congregant in this church, your brother and sister in the Lord to hear the words of God, to heed them, to keep the name of Christ for himself, to stand in the day of trial.

I think this will cultivate both a spirit of Christ likeness and also a spirit of gratefulness, to look at just how graced and blessed we are to be in a place surrounded by brothers and sisters who love the Lord and who desire with everything in us to stand.

I pray that this text to the Philadelphians tonight encourages us on that journey. Let's pray. Lord, we thank you that you have seen fit to speak to the Philadelphians in this way, that you preserve this letter for us.

They were small and weak, yet they were faithful and they form an example for us to be faithful, Lord. I pray that we would be encouraging to those around us.

I pray that we would strive for greater and greater faithfulness, to endure in the midst of trial and tribulation, and to see every small work as one day to be written down in the book of the annals of your people and your history, Lord.

[34 : 02] Lord. Now give us a heart of worship as we conclude this service with singing. In Jesus name I pray. Amen. Amen. Brothers and sisters, as we think about the word that Justin just encouraged us with, we want to use this final worship time as a means to focus our hearts back on Christ.

And this is what these last two songs are about. So please stand and worship with us. Amen.