

"Self Doubt"

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Date: 12 November 2023

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[0 : 0 0] All right. Friends, today we continue our sermon series on the letters that we find written in the book of Revelation. And thus far in this series, we have encountered several letters dictated by Jesus to different churches, and most of these churches have been rebuked by Jesus. Most of these churches have struggled with sins like sexual immorality, moral complacency, lukewarm faith, false teaching, idolatry, and so on. And all of these sins have spoken warnings and rebukes to us and to our church here and now. But with the letter we are reading today, we have a different church.

We have a church that Jesus does not rebuke. This church, it turns out, labored under oppression and under slander and gossip and rejection and weakness and loss of worldly identity and loss of family connections. Yet in all this, they remained faithful to Christ. What does Jesus have to say to this kind of church and this kind of Christian? As we will see, friends, he speaks much words of assurance and comfort, and he encourages them to embrace their identity in Christ and not their identity in this world. And he offers them many promises. Throughout the sermon series, we have read the letters in Revelation as if they were written to us. So this morning, let us hear the words in this letter as if Jesus spoke them to us. And what Jesus' letter says to you is to not be conformed to this world, but to embrace your identity in Christ, your citizenship in heaven, your membership in the body of Christ. And this is especially true for those of you who've been rejected by others because you follow Jesus. The letter to the church that we're going to read can be found in the book of Revelation. It's to the church in ancient Philadelphia. It's on page 966 in your pew Bible. This is Revelation chapter 3, verses 7 through 13. And that's again page 966.

And this letter reads like this. 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, and 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.

[3 : 0 5] 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. Friends, let's pray together.

Let's pray together. Oh, Father, we submit ourselves to your word. We pray that we would be like this ancient church in Philadelphia, that we would stand fast in times of trial.

Lord, I pray that you would help us to understand your word, your figures of speech, which sometimes are hard to understand. I pray that you would open our hearts to listen, that you would give us ears to what the Spirit says to the churches.

Father, we submit to you in your will, and we pray all this in the mighty name of Jesus. Amen. Amen. The structure of the sermon this morning will go like this. First, we're going to look at how Jesus introduces himself in this letter to the Philadelphians.

[4 : 32] And then secondly, we'll examine a little bit about what kind of things the church in Philadelphia was suffering. And then most of our time will be spent meditating upon the promises and exhortations that Jesus gives to the church in ancient Philadelphia.

And therefore, what promises and what exhortations that he gives to you regarding your identity in Christ? We begin in verse 7.

There Jesus says, There Jesus says to the angel of the church in Philadelphia, Right, 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.

Jesus starts by declaring certain things about himself. He says that he is the holy one. He's the true one. He's sanctified. He's set apart. From Jesus, we derive our holiness.

From him, we derive the truth. There is no lie found in Jesus. And this true one, this true one, this Jesus, he is the one writing to the church in Philadelphia.

[5 : 36] Now, all that is clear to most people in this verse, but the other things Jesus says about himself are a bit more confusing. What I wonder is the key of David that Jesus says he possesses.

And what does opening and shutting have to do with Jesus and the Christian life? Revelation in this passage borrows from Isaiah the prophet, chapter 22, verse 22, where God says, And I will place on his shoulder the key of the house of David.

He shall open and no one shall shut. He shall shut and no one shall open. The context of this passage in Isaiah shows that several hundred years before Revelation was written, God spoke through Isaiah about a new steward who would be appointed over the house of David in Isaiah's time and who would be given David's key so that he might manage all the affairs of the kingdom and have authority to permit and to prevent, to allow and to forbid all manner of activities and all manner of people.

In the scriptures, the kingdom of David, of course, is the very kingdom of the Messiah. It's the kingdom that the Messiah would inherit and rule forever. It was that kingdom which the Messiah would elevate from just an earthly kingdom into a heavenly one.

And if we put all these things together, we see that the key of David in Revelation symbolizes the power to manage the affairs of the Davidic kingdom. The Messiah's heavenly kingdom.

[7 : 08] And Revelation says that it is Jesus who possesses it. He is the one who has the authority to open and close privileges in this kingdom to others. So in the first verse, Jesus declares that he is holy.

He is true. He is the steward over the messianic kingdom. And whomever he chooses, the privileges of this kingdom will be granted. Now, as we know what Jesus says to the church in Philadelphia, he in many ways says to us here at Trinity.

What he says to the church in Philadelphia, he says to you specifically. So do not be mistaken then. When Jesus says that he has the key of David, and when he says that what he shuts no one may open, and what he opens no one may shut, do not be mistaken.

For when he says these things, he's speaking not just to the ancient church, but to you. And there is one privilege in particular that Jesus has opened for you, O Christian.

In the next verse, in verse 8, Jesus says this, I know your works. Behold, I have set before you an open door, which no one is able to shut.

[8 : 19] This verse tells us that Jesus knows your works. He knows your deeds. And behold, he uses his authority over the messianic heavenly kingdom to set before you an open door, which no one is able to shut.

This door is nothing less than the entryway into this heavenly and eternal kingdom. Now, the translation we use here at Trinity says that Jesus sets before you an open door.

But a translation that is perhaps a bit more faithful to the Greek, instead of reading an open door, it would read an opened door. That is a door that has been opened.

A door that had once been shut, but now is open. You see, in this verse, Jesus communicates that that entry into the kingdom of God is impossible for us.

That door was shut. We could not open it. But thanks be to God, we have a Savior, Christ the Lord, who's gone into the heavens and opened this door for you, his beloved.

[9 : 30] And no one can shut it. And so Jesus says, I've set before you an opened door, which no one is able to shut. Christians, this is a profound gospel truth.

Those whom Christ has appointed to live in his heavenly kingdom cannot be cast out. The door has been opened. No one can shut it. Jesus proclaims this specifically in the Gospel of John.

He says, I give them eternal life and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. So do not fear, Christian, when you are rejected in this world for Christ.

The devil cannot touch you when you are with Jesus. Your enemies cannot harm you. Death and sin cannot reach you. They may roar. They may gnash their teeth. They may bear their claws.

But you are safe with Jesus. The door to eternal life has been opened by Christ, and no one is able to shut it. And be especially assured of this truth.

[10 : 33] If you are weak today, or if you are lonely in this moment, if you are slandered at this time, or gossiped about because you follow Christ, if you have in any way lost your worldly identity, if you are struggling with who you are, if you are oppressed because of your love for Jesus, then as you will see, Jesus has you specifically in mind in this letter we are reading.

Because if you are struggling with these things, if you're weak or slandered or rejected by others, if you have lost your identity on this earth because of Jesus, then you are much like the church in Philadelphia, because they too were suffering the same things.

And Jesus goes on to comfort them and exhort them. So let us now turn to look a little bit at the kinds of things that the church in Philadelphia was suffering.

We can glean these things by jumping around a little bit in verses 8, 9, and 10. We start in verse 8. Jesus says, I know that you have but little power, and yet you've kept my word and have not denied my name.

In verse 8, Jesus says that he knows that the Christians of Philadelphia have little power. Therefore, it seems that the Christians in Philadelphia were weak by worldly standards.

[11 : 55] And verse 8 also goes on to say that even though they were weak, the Christians kept his word and did not deny his name. This implies to us that not only were the Philadelphian Christians weak, they also faced opposition.

Yet in this they remained faithful, and they did not deny the name of Jesus. And jumping to verse 10, Jesus says something similar. He says, You have kept my word of patient endurance.

So not only are the Christians in Philadelphia weak, not only have they faced oppression, this oppression seems to have gone on for some time because Jesus says they were patiently enduring.

We do not know the specifics of what the church in Philadelphia was suffering, but we get a hint of it in verse 9. There Jesus says, He speaks of a synagogue of Satan who say that they are Jews but are not, and lie.

This kind of oppression that the church in Philadelphia was experiencing seems to have at least in part involved being slandered by contemporary Jews who lived in their city.

[13 : 10] We saw this a few weeks ago in Jesus' letter to the church in Smyrna. To reconstruct what was going on, we have to read between the lines a little bit here and also draw from the historical context.

But the best historical estimate is that in Philadelphia, there was a community of Jewish Christians, and they seem to have worshipped in the local synagogue. As mentioned in the sermon a few weeks ago, it was common for Christians in the early church to do this, to worship in the synagogues.

We see Christians, even the apostles, doing this in the book of Acts. But evidently, the Jews in the synagogue of Philadelphia were criticizing Jewish Christians and saying that they could only be Jewish if they did not confess Jesus as the Messiah.

Christians in Philadelphia were therefore suffering under slander, and they had probably been excommunicated from the synagogue. They were likely cut off from friends and family.

This would have meant that they would have lost their ethnic, their religious, their cultural, even their national identity. And if we put all these things together, we learn a little bit, about what the church in Philadelphia was suffering.

[14 : 19] They were weak. They were oppressed. They were slandered. They were vulnerable. They were lonely. They were rudderless in a sea without a worldly home or worldly identity.

But despite all of this, they kept the word of Jesus, and they did not deny his name, and they patiently persevered. So I ask you, friend, are you suffering these things?

Are you weak? Are you downtrodden? Are you meek or weak or hurting or buffeted back and forth? Are you slandered or oppressed or weary or lonely?

Have you been cut off from friends or family? Are there those in your workplace or in your school who gossip about you behind your back because you follow Jesus?

Have you lost your identity in this world? And in all these things, are you keeping Jesus' word? Are you refusing to deny his name?

[15 : 24] The church in Philadelphia suffered like you. They had no strength. They were oppressed, it seems, by both Jews and Gentiles. They were slandered. In all probability, they were rejected by friends and family.

Yet unlike some of the churches in Revelation, most of the churches in Revelation, they kept Jesus' word and they patiently persevered.

Friends, it is no wonder that Jesus goes on in his letter to assure these Christians of their salvation and to comfort them and to promise them many things regarding that heavenly kingdom Jesus is preparing for them and for you and also to assure them about their new identity he is giving to them and to you as a Christian.

So let's turn to these promises now. And before I start, I must say that these promises can be a little difficult to interpret, so we'll go through them one by one.

First, in verse 9 of his letter to the Philadelphians, Jesus refers to those who slandered and opposed the Christians of Philadelphia. He says, Behold, I will make them come and bow down before your feet and they will learn that I have loved you.

[16 : 43] What could this mean? It might sound as if these persecutors will be forced to worship Christians. It might sound that way in English, but in the original Greek, I think it's a bit more clear.

These enemies are not worshiping Christians. Instead, they are worshiping God in front of the Christians that they persecuted. This touches upon Judgment Day when every tongue will confess and every knee will bow, when the nations will be gathered before Jesus, when all people will come and they'll come from the east and from the west and from the north and from the south and they'll cast their crowns before him.

And we will all be together on that day, every one of us. And Scripture says that not only will every Christian be there, but every non-Christian, and not just every human being, but every being on heaven and on earth and under the earth.

All creation, all the angels will be there, the demons will be there too, and we will all fall before the throne of Jesus. And Jesus gives specific comfort to those of you who have suffered under lies or been slandered or rejected for the sake of Christ.

Jesus says that whoever has lied about you, whoever has done so on account of me, whoever has slandered you, whoever has rejected you because of me, on that day they will be made to learn that I have loved you.

[18 : 13] Friends, make no mistake, we are called to love our enemies. Scripture commands us to pray for those who persecute you.

Bless those who curse you. Turn and offer your left cheek when struck on the right. Do good to those who do evil. Forgive those who have wronged you because vengeance is mine, says the Lord.

I will repay. Scripture is also clear that the love of God has been poured out in your heart, not because of anything worthy that you have done, not because of your works, not because you've earned it as a wage that is due to you, but only and simply because God in His glory set His love upon you and rescued you from the domain of darkness.

On account of this, you should not take passages as the one we have before us to lord it over those who made you suffer. Instead, take these passages to walk with humility.

Take them as a comfort that when you suffer for Christ, when you are rejected by others, God will vindicate you. You don't need to worry about vengeance. You don't need to justify yourself before those who gossip or slander about you.

[19 : 31] You don't need to be anxious over whether you'll be found innocent. And do not believe any of those things they say. Christ is for you. Who can be against you?

For Jesus has promised that all those who have rejected or mocked you will be made to know on that day that God has loved you when He comes to judge the earth.

Well, friends, let us move on to a second promise I want to highlight. This is in verse 10 where Jesus says, because you have kept the word of my 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.

This verse has occasioned much controversy in theological circles. Many faithful Christians have taken this verse to mean that Jesus will spare Christians from the trials mentioned in the book of Revelation because this verse promises to rescue Christians from the great trial that is coming on the whole earth.

Other faithful Christians disagree and point out that Revelation does seem to include Christians as suffering the trials that are to come. For instance, in Revelation 6.11 seems to reference Christians being killed and you can see similar things in chapter 7.14 or 12.11, 12.17 and verses like that.

[20 : 52] Now, in this alternative perspective, what Jesus promises to spare the Philadelphians from is either the terrible woe in Revelation 9 where only those who are sealed with God's name are spared.

Or perhaps what he's talking about is the great trial of the lake of fire that is prepared for all those who reject Christ. We may touch on these things in a later sermon but whatever the case, remember friends that we must read Revelation with humility.

There are mysteries in it that will not be made clear until they are fulfilled. Remember also that the finer points about the end times, these friends are secondary or even tertiary issues and we don't want to be divisive about them or focus on them over much.

So regardless of your view on the end times, what we know is this. In this present life, Christ calls us to bear our crosses and he tells us that suffering will come to us whether or not it comes in the end times or not.

And we also know that Christ promises to welcome us into his kingdom and to make all know that he has loved you. So take heart, friends. Jesus promises to spare you from the coming trial, whatever that may be.

[22 : 13] Friends, I could go on about this passage for some time but let's hasten on because Jesus has more promises for those of you who are faithful to Christ when suffering rejection by others.

Verse 12 reads this. Jesus says, To the one who conquers, I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God. Never shall he go out of it. The phrase, To the one who conquers, this refers to those who continue to persevere in the faith.

To these, God will make a pillar in the temple of God, the temple that's located in the coming heavenly kingdom. Never will they leave his presence.

With this, Jesus, of course, doesn't mean that he's actually going to turn you into a pillar of stone. Instead, he's speaking figuratively or symbolically here.

And to understand this promise, we must know that a pillar in Scripture signifies permanence, steadfastness, immovability, constancy. So by using symbolic language, Jesus communicates that you who have persevered in the faith in times of trial or in being rejected or in losing your worldly identity or your community.

[23 : 25] To you, Jesus says, you will be spared not only the coming trial, but you will also be in God's presence forever in his temple. You will no longer be rejected.

You will be with him and more than that, you will be a necessary, a crucial aspect of the functioning of the temple of God. Just as a pillar crucially upholds a building, so you will not be worthless.

You will be an integral part of the kingdom of God. Whatever your worth is now, you will not be worthless then. Christ will make you fit for valued service in his kingdom just as a pillar upholds a temple.

And not only that, Jesus goes on to say in that same verse, and I will write on him the name of my God. Again, friends, this doesn't mean that we're going to literally walk around with the letters of God scribbled all over our face.

Instead, again, this is an example of symbolic language. Inscribing God's name on you means that you are set apart for God. You belong to him.

[24 : 35] You are part of his household. You are cherished by him and protected by him. This is similar to Exodus 28, verse 36 through 38, where the phrase holy to the Lord is inscribed on the gold plate mounted on the high priest's forehead.

To write God's name on the high priest was a marker claiming that the high priest was set apart specifically for God. It indicated that he belonged to God and was set apart for service to God in a special way.

In the same way, Christian, you who have been faithful to Christ in times of trial, in times of being rejected or slandered, in times of suffering for Christ, you belong to God now.

You have been purchased by him. You are in his household forever. You are safe with him, protected by his shield. You are under his banner and you have been purchased by his blood eternally.

For this reason, the Apostle Paul says, you are not your own. You were bought with a price. And to indicate all of this, Jesus in Revelation symbolically promises to write the name of God upon you.

[25 : 51] But Jesus has more words of promise for you, Christian, who are persevering in trial and worldly rejection. He says he will not just write his name on you. He says in verse 12, I will also write the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which comes down from heaven, from my God.

As we just saw, being called the name of someone meant that you belong to that person's household. But here you must know that in the ancient world, being called by the name of a city meant that you were a citizen of that city.

So here when Jesus inscribes the name of the city of God, the new Jerusalem, which comes down from heaven, he is proclaiming in no uncertain terms that you are a citizen of that heavenly city forever.

Your old identity has passed away. All these earthly cities, these earthly countries, earthly families, these are as nothing to that heavenly kingdom where you, Jesus says, have been elected a citizen by God himself, a city that will never pass away like those on this earth.

Paul the Apostle writes of this to the Philippians. He says in chapter 3 to his epistle, but our citizenship is in heaven and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself.

[27 : 21] Christian, if you are longing for citizenship in an earthly country, or if your identity has been taken from you, if you've been abandoned by family or friends or your community, do not be troubled by these things.

God has reserved for you a better citizenship and a better family, a better community, one which can never be taken away, which will not be overthrown. He has gotten for you an irrevocable citizenship in heaven and a permanent, heavenly identity.

And brothers and sisters, all of us here at Trinity, we are just a small, humble foretaste as sampling a token of that spiritual family that you've been given eternally and forever.

But Jesus is not done yet. He says he will not only make you a pillar in this temple, he will not only inscribe the name of God on you in the name of the heavenly city, he also says that he will also inscribe my own new name.

Again, this indicates that you now belong to Jesus just as you belong to God the Father. But notice here that Jesus, he doesn't say he's just going to write his name on you.

[28 : 37] He says he will write his new name on you. What is this new name? Jesus is called by many names in the scriptures.

Of course, he's called Jesus, which means the Lord saves. Jesus is also called the wisdom of God, the word of God, the son of God. He's called Emmanuel, which means God with us.

But none of these are new names for Jesus. They're old names. So Jesus can't be talking about those names. What then is this new name that Jesus promises to write on you?

Friends, this is one of those places where scholars and theologians are not so sure. This name, our best guess, is this name probably refers to the new name of Jesus mentioned in Revelation chapter 19 in verse 12.

There in that passage, the apostle John is given a vision of when Jesus returns in the end of days. He says, Then I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse, the one sitting on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war.

[29 : 49] His eyes are like a flame of fire and on his head are many diadems, and he has a name written that no one knows but himself. He is clothed in a robe dipped in blood, and the name of which he is called is the Word of God.

And the armies of heaven arrayed in fine linen, white and pure, were following him on white horses. Jesus, in this passage, is called the Word of God.

His robe is dipped in his own blood which he shed for you to redeem you and to purchase you and to set you free. And he rides a white horse leading the armies of heaven on that day when he returns.

But aside from being called the Word of God, there's also another name for Jesus in this passage, and this name is written on him, and no one knows this name but Jesus himself.

It's plausible, even likely, that this is the new name we read about in Jesus' letter to the church in Philadelphia. This is the new name of Jesus which Jesus will write on you.

[30 : 55] It's the name by which you will be called on that last day when Jesus counts you as his own, as a member of his household forever, as a true child of God and as a citizen of his city, as a brother and sister a faithful servant and a friend.

But whereas when the name of God the Father was written on you, it marked you as belonging to the Father's household, the new name of Jesus marks you not just as being part of that household but having the privilege of the inheritance as a firstborn son.

for since Jesus is the only begotten of the Father, he inherits a kingdom and because he has set his name on you, you also will inherit that kingdom and reign with him.

And more than this, just as we identify someone's family name, someone's family based on their last name, so also in heaven you will be given a name of Jesus as a kind of new last name.

Think about this in your mind now. You have a first name, many of you have a middle name, you have a last name, however many names you have, they were given to you by someone and most of them indicate your membership in a family.

[32 : 06] And at the end of days at the resurrection, Jesus will add to your names a final and eternal name, his new name, and you will be called by that name forever. Your family will be that of God the Father and you will partake in the inheritance of Christ your brother and your old identity will have passed away, your new will have come.

You belong to Jesus now. Friends, this letter has spoken many promises to us and the sum of them is this.

Your identity is not in this world. It is not what people think of you. It is not in your earthly connections. It is not in your worldly citizenship.

It is not in your family ties. It is not in your wealth, your career, your education. Instead, your identity is in Christ Jesus. In him, you have an eternal home, an eternal family, an eternal country in heaven with him, a forever citizenship.

Be comforted in this, friends. Do not fear the rejection of this world or the slander of others because you follow Christ. Christ. Well, brothers and sisters, in view of these promises, what word of advice does Jesus have for those of you who are faithfully persevering in this world?

[33 : 35] He speaks this in verse 11. He says, I am coming soon. Hold fast what you have so that no one may seize your crown.

Amen, friends. Let me conclude this sermon with the same exhortation. Hold fast, dear Christian. Do not grow weary. Jesus is coming soon.

Hold fast to what you have. Do not let anyone seize your crown. Pay no attention when people speak ill of you because of Christ. Don't be troubled of these things. Instead, grow in joyfulness.

Grow in mercy. Grow in long-suffering and perseverance. You're king. He knows your sufferings. And he comes to judge the earth. And there lies in store for you a citizenship in heaven, a membership in the eternal family of God which will never fade away.

brothers and sisters, join me in prayer thanking God for these things. Oh, Father in heaven, we thank you for these promises.

[34 : 53] We thank you that you, by the blood of your son Jesus, have welcomed us as your children, adopted us as your sons and daughters, that you have helped us, you have given us that right due to nothing we have done to partake in the inheritance of Christ.

Father, I pray for anyone here who is suffering under rejection, under slander, or gossip, for anyone who has been separated by family or friends because they follow you.

Father, I pray you would give them courage, you would give them perseverance, you would help them to hold fast, to not lose their crown. Lord, for those of us who are not suffering these things, I pray you would help us to encourage and exhort and bear with others who are, to build them up and lift them up.

I pray we would learn from them too, Lord, and learn from their wisdom gotten by perseverance in the faithful path of obedience to Christ. Christ. Oh, Father, we also pray that Jesus would come soon and we lay ourselves before him and it's in his mighty name that we pray.

Amen. Amen.