

Christ's Last Word to His Church SERIES: Philadelphia: How to Build a Quake-Proof Life Revelation 3:7-13

This morning we look at what should become the model for us at Calvary. This morning Revelation 3 introduces us to the church that pleased Jesus Christ, and thus had a His blessings poured upon all that they did for Him.

Of all the seven churches, Philadelphia, the sixth church can be described as the Faithful Church, and stands out as the model. This morning my prayer would be that we as a church here at Calvary would be seen by our Lord as a church filled with Philadelphia-like saints, who gather and live out Christ in this faithful way.

The promises Christ gave them, the insights He shares with them, and the lessons He offers to us who listen: are unparalleled in any of the other letters. First we can call:

Philadelphia: The Faithful Church

If you don't yet have a favorite Epistle that Jesus Christ wrote, this one may be a good candidate. Their example as faithful, obedient, serving, and worshipping saints is so powerful. They were not perfect, just forgiven. They were not superior in any way, just responsive to God's desires for them individually and as a church.

Each of these seven letters is a model, example, and symbol of the types of churches and believers that will exist, side-by-side, throughout all the generations of Christ's Church: from Pentecost to the Rapture.

In a world that is so needy Christ has left His Church as a light; but some are distracted like Ephesus; and some are deeply persecuted and barely holding on like Smyrna; and others are compromised like Pergamos; and others are harboring secret sins like Thyatira, or dead like Sardis. But one church is vibrant, alive, faithful, evangelizing, worshipping, and doing just what Jesus Christ left them to do. May we all ask the Lord to enable us to choose to live as they lived. Next remember that:

Philadelphia: The Quake Prone City

The one geographic feature that you wouldn't know about this church without a study Bible, commentary, or a trip to the modern city of Alasehir in Turkey, built around the

ruins of Biblical Philadelphia is: this was an active fault zone, with ongoing seismic activity.

The rich agricultural valleys with volcanic soil experience regular tremors. The cities around Philadelphia had all been destroyed by massive quakes in the century around the writing of this letter. Philadelphia was flattened in AD 17 as was Sardis, and was given tax reprieve by Emperor Tiberius, and aid for rebuilding.

So, to these people knew what it was like to be shaken out of bed, to be startled by the swaying of the ground, and to be amazed at the way everything that seems so stable and firm was so fragile and prone to destruction.

Philadelphians had grown up learning to flee their homes when the tremors came for fear of being crushed. For those of this church, to hear Christ's offer of security, stability, freedom from fearful flight must have been so powerful.

Only Christ Offers Quake Proof Living

Jesus explained to them that though they would always live in an area with quakes and tremors that could destroy all their physical possessions: following Him offered them treasures that could never be lost, and lives that would never be hopeless.

In a world of uncertainties, lurking disasters, constant unknowns, and endless potential dangers—Jesus Christ said: here is the way to quake-proof your life. Keep on trusting, following, serving, and investing in my church. Only Christ's Church offers and investment that is never lost, depreciated, stolen, or destroyed.

Now, join me as we listen to Christ's most encouraging, and most comfort-filled epistle of all seven in Revelation 2-3. Please stand as we hear His voice in Rev. 3:7-13:

*Revelation 3:7-13 (NKJV) "And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write, 'These things says He who is holy, He who is true, "He who has the key of David, He who opens and no one shuts, and shuts and no one opens": 8 **"I know your works.** See, I have set before you an open door, and no one can shut it; for you have a little strength, have kept My word, and have not denied My name. 9 Indeed I will make those of the synagogue of Satan, who say they are Jews and are not, but lie—indeed I will make them come and worship before your feet, and to know that I have loved you. 10 Because you have kept My command to persevere, I also will keep you from the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth. 11 Behold, I am coming quickly! **Hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown.** 12 He who overcomes, **I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he shall go out no more.** 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 out of heaven from My God. And I will write on him My new name. 13 "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."*

Pray

As we turn our attention towards these words we just read from Christ, the first thing we need to notice is that Jesus has done something differently in His address to Philadelphia. In the first 5 letters Christ's introduction of Himself comes from the titles He gave in chapter 1. He just repeats, regroups, or combines the prior terms, but always follows the previously referenced descriptions.

Jesus never introduces Himself to these churches just by His Name, He always adds a definition of His Character, and a description of Himself. But, up until this sixth church, those descriptions and definitions parallel what was already stated in Revelation 1.

But not to this faithful church at Philadelphia, to them Jesus reaches back across the pages of the Old Testament, and pulls together some of the most powerful descriptions of our Almighty, Covenant keeping, God of Heaven. The congregation must have grown very silent as these words were read¹.

Here in the Epistle to the Philadelphians (3:7-13), Jesus Christ introduces Himself by using a string of four Hebrew descriptions of God that if we meditate upon what they reveal, they are powerful, comforting, challenging, and inspiring. First note them with me in v.7:

Revelation 3:7-13 (NKJV) "And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write, 'These things says: 1). He who is **holy**; 2). He who is **true**; 3). "He who **has the key of David**; 4). He who **opens and no one shuts, and shuts and no one opens**":

For a moment we need to pause our look at all the rest of this letter, and focus upon just these four descriptive titles Christ Jesus takes, and see the implications of each. First:

Jesus Christ is The Holy God

Jesus introduces Himself again to them. They knew who He was. They were saved, but they needed this reminder, as do each of us today. Jesus Christ describes Himself as Holy. That is Christ taking for Himself the description of the Absolutely Holy God of the Bible². That means He is the only source of un-polluted, un-fallen, un-cursed, un-blighted existence. God alone is Holy. He alone possesses such purity, all else is subject to sin, corruption, and decay.

Look ahead to Rev. 4:8 where we see this description around the Throne scene of

¹ For a moment think about how these letters arrived. I personally agree with what my pastor taught on this passage, as I was studying in seminary. He said that angel literally means messenger. John called for seven men to assemble, receive copies of the entire book of Revelation, and take the entire book, and specifically the letter or Epistle to each of the churches, to that church. In the New Testament, the Greek word for angels (aggelos) is also sometimes used for human messengers (Matthew 11:10, Mark 1:2, Luke 7:27, Luke 9:52, James 2:25). If these messengers traveled from Patmos to Miletus and up to Ephesus, they would have gone roughly 50 miles north to Smyrna, then another 50 miles north to Pergamos; then east to Thyatira; then south to Sardis; then southeast to Philadelphia; and further southeast to Laodicea; ending up nearly due east of Ephesus where they started.

² In the Old Testament this is constantly declared Lev. 19:2; Isaiah 40:25; 43:15; Psalm 16:10; Hab. 3:3 to name a few.

Heaven's atmosphere of worship:

Revelation 4:8 (NKJV) The four living creatures, each having six wings, were full of eyes around and within. And they do not rest day or night, saying: "**Holy, holy, holy**, Lord God Almighty, Who was and is and is to come!"

As we look back at Rev. 3:7, Jesus is saying that He is separate from sin. Holy means separate from sin, so to say He is holy means He is separate from sin. Jesus is totally unlike us in this sense. He is holy by nature of who He is, and we are not. This was how Jesus kept being seen when He was revealed as the Messiah of God in the Gospels. Turn back there with me to Mark 1.

Mark 1:21-24 (NKJV) Then they went into Capernaum, and immediately on the Sabbath He entered the synagogue and taught. 22 And they were astonished at His teaching, for He taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes. 23 Now there was a man in their synagogue with an unclean spirit. And he cried out, 24 saying, "Let us alone! What have we to do with You, Jesus of Nazareth? Did You come to destroy us? **I know who You are—the Holy One of God!**"

Look at Luke 1:35 next. So fallen angels, or demons when they saw Jesus the Messiah cried out their confession that He was the Holy One of God. Now in Luke 1, note what the holy angels say to Mary:

Luke 1:35 (NKJV) And the angel answered and said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, **that Holy One who is to be born** will be called the Son of God.

Next, as we turn to John 6, look at what the disciples confess as they got to know Jesus Christ the Messiah. The ESV brings this translation out clearly in v. 68-69:

John 6:68-69 (ESV) Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life, 69 and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are **the Holy One of God.**"

Now, watch Peter's sermon in Acts 3, as he declares to everyone gathered after the miraculous healing of the lame man, who this Messiah they had crucified truly was:

Acts 3:14 (NKJV) But you **denied the Holy One and the Just**, and asked for a murderer to be granted to you,

Peter reminds the unbelievers who heard him, that they took Barabbas the murderer, instead of Jesus the Life-Giver. Jesus is the One with hair as white as snow, the Holy Son of the Infinite, Absolutely Pure and Holy Ancient of Days.

So when He said I am Holy, Jesus was identifying Himself to the saints at Philadelphia as the One from the Old Testament that is the Holy and Pure One. As this Holy and Just One, He can't tolerate sin.

Jesus Christ Expects Holy Living

Jesus Christ as the Messiah of God shares the very nature of God and is holy, harmless, undefiled and made separate from sinners (Heb. 7:26). That means something very clearly to us as Peter goes on to say in his letter:

1 Peter 1:15 (NKJV) but as **He who called you is holy**, you also be holy in all your conduct,

Jesus Christ is the Holy One. Jesus demands holiness in those who are His. He won't tolerate sin. He says that His expectations go all the way to our "conduct", a Greek³ word that is translated: behavior (6x), conduct (4x), manner of life (2x), way of life (1x); and means: "dealing with other people, behavior".

Now this is what is fascinating: this Holy God the Son, the Messiah who is Just and Pure, the All-seeing God of the Universe who knows us completely, named Jesus Christ—affirms this attribute of holiness: and then **does not condemn the believers in Philadelphia for anything!**

Look back at the text in v. 8. Jesus Christ who is Omniscient, remember His eyes of blazing fire (Rev. 1:14) that can penetrate anything, seeing clearly everything says these words, "I know your works".

He has just affirmed that He is the Holy, Just, Pure Almighty God, yet in the following verse of knowing their lives He has nothing to condemn them for. They were just saved and forgiven sinners like all the other churches; but Christ does not find anything to condemn them for, like He did with Ephesus, Pergamos, Thyatira, Sardis, and soon Laodicea.

When Christ's inspection of their fellowship produces **no** rebukes, **no** warnings, and **no** condemnation: they become a very compelling model for us, given by Jesus Christ Himself to us, **of what it takes to please God as a local church.**

Now back to the second descriptive title in v. 7. Jesus writes: 'These things says: 1). He who is **holy**; 2). He who is **true**:

Jesus Christ Is Truth

God is often described as holy and true, so Jesus Christ takes this reflection of God's eternal character and introduces Himself to the saints as Philadelphia. He says the Holy and True One is speaking to you. The word is **alethinós** which speaks of being real, genuine, as opposed to being fake or counterfeit.

³ Anastrophe, Greek word number 391.

The combination of God as holy/righteous and true in v. 7 is a pattern we see throughout Revelation.

Revelation 6:10 (NKJV) And they cried with a loud voice, saying, "How long, O Lord, **holy and true**, until You judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?"

Revelation 15:3 (NKJV) They sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying: "Great and marvelous are Your works, Lord God Almighty! **Just and true are Your ways**, O King of the saints!

Revelation 16:7 (NKJV) And I heard another from the altar saying, "Even so, Lord God Almighty, **true and righteous** are Your judgments."

Revelation 19:2 (NKJV) For **true and righteous** are His judgments, because He has judged the great harlot who corrupted the earth with her fornication; and He has avenged on her the blood of His servants shed by her."

Again, look back at our text in Rev. 3:7. The Holy One is speaking, and He is also the True One. This Holy and True One who speaks the truth, and sees everything, and demands holiness and separation from sin has visited them, watched them, analyzed them, and presents His findings in v. 8, and has nothing to rebuke them for.

What an Incredible Church

What an incredible church. They were not perfect, they were not sinless, they were not given something different than every other church: **they were just faithful to that Word that had received**. They obeyed what the Lord told them: Confess and forsake sin when it comes, no matter how often.

The God of Truth, who is truth, Who speaks truth, Who demands truth on the inward parts has visited and gives His true report: *there is nothing to condemn in the lives of my saints when they are faithfully dealing with sin.*

Before we move on to the third description Christ uses, pause and let what we just saw in this letter, sink in. That is how to build a stable, hope-filled life today, and be ready for the future. Jesus offers a quake-proof life: a life that won't suffer loss at the Bema Seat of Christ.

The God of Holiness and the God of Truth, who sees all, hears all, and knows all, visits this assembly, and like He found at Smyrna, again He finds here nothing to correct. It must have so incredibly encouraged these saints.

To the Smyrna saints (Rev. 2:8-11), as they faced fiery persecutions, Jesus Christ said I am the One who was "dead and came to life"; so He knew all about what they went

through, and would go with them through even the martyrdom some would face.

To the Philadelphian saints He said, I see all as the Holy and True God and conclude that there is nothing I need to change. That offers the amazing truth for us that it is possible, within the Scriptural truths we have been given, to please God in our daily lives to this extent: **that there is nothing He needs to rebuke or condemn us for.**

Though all of us are weak, frail, and very aware of our fallen humanity, yet Jesus shows us that we can live this pleasing life in His Holy sight.

As we go through life the way the Scriptures tell us: we sin, we repent, we seek His cleansing and experience His forgiveness. In all of that, faithfully living and walking the pathway He left for us, Jesus Christ the God of Truth and Holiness finds lives He can commend.

That is amazing. That is thrilling. That is what the saints at Philadelphia heard. That is what each of us should desire to be by His grace each day.

Now look back at v. 7 for the third description Jesus Christ speaks by way of introducing Himself. He says 'These things says: 1). He who is **holy**; 2). He who is **true**; 3). "He who **has the key of David**.

It is possible that, to many of us, this Old Testament description of a "key of David" from Isaiah 22:22 seems remote. It seems mysterious, or even makes us wonder why that would even be important. But it held a vast trove of truth to them.

The Isaiah passage uses the phrase "key of David" in the context of Shebna, who was the steward of the king of Judah. This position described the one who served the king as one who: dispensed the king's wealth, who allowed entrance to the king's presence, and who was often second in power to the king, much like a prime minister.

In God's Word, David is much more than just the shepherd-boy, giant-killer, and Psalm-writer as we see him across the pages of Scripture. In those 141 chapters of the Bible that contain inspired insights about David we find that David also symbolized the office of the Messiah.

Jesus the Messiah Opens the Power, Riches, & Presence of God

The Anointed One of God, the Messiah was promised to come as a descendent of David, who (listen to this similar description) would dispense God's treasures, who would open God's Presence, and who was the second person of the Trinity.

The steward of the king held the key to the dispensing of the king's wealth and power: and that is what the promised, anointed, Messiah the Christ was coming to do for God the Father.

Look over to Revelation 5. Here in the scene of the Throne Room of the Universe, in the midst of the endless waves of worship rising before the Almighty, look at v. 5. Here is something we sometimes could miss.

Revelation 5:5 (NKJV) But one of the elders said to me, "Do not weep. Behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, ***the Root of David***, has prevailed to open the scroll and to loose its seven seals."

Now, turn onward to the ending chapter, Revelation 22:

Revelation 22:16 (NKJV) "I, Jesus, have sent My angel to testify to you these things in the churches. ***I am the Root and the Offspring of David***, the Bright and Morning Star."

The Bible ends with Jesus Christ our Messiah saying that He is the Root (the source of David's very existence as Creator), and the Offspring of David (as the virgin born, son of David born to be God in human flesh). The plan God designed for salvation is amazing, consistent, and powerful.

Jesus Christ: The Key to All Blessings

Back to our text in Rev. 3:7, where Jesus says I have the "key of David". In God's Word whenever we see key we see a symbol of authority. Another way to say "authority" is to call it "control". The key is the authority or control over something.

As Messiah Jesus Christ is the One who can dispense the treasures or riches of God. This is Jesus telling this dear church that pleased Him so that He had the keys to access the treasures of God, and the authority to dispense them upon their life and their church.

Later in the letter we'll see that authority to bless them led to fantastic results in their community evangelism. A sign of God's favor and blessing is when we see Him opening great doors to evangelism, and see former enemies of Christ bowing at His feet. This was part of the promise given to this church.

Jesus Christ: The Only Door to Life Eternal

Another facet of this key is that Jesus Christ alone can grant access to God. He holds the keys to Hell and Death (Rev. 1:18) and here in 3:7 the keys to Life and Heaven.

He alone is the way to eternal life. No one can come to the Father except through Him, and He alone can draw them (John 6). His sovereignty is seen in these keys.

In John 10 Jesus Christ is the Door; in John 11 He is Resurrection and Life; and in John

14 He is the Way.

Jesus said that He came to open the door of life that is abundant, He announced that treasure to the Jews, and most of them rejected Him. Here in Rev. 3:9 are some antagonistic Jews, who are still rejecting Christ's authority to open eternal life and forgiveness, but they were wrong.

Jesus is Holy God, Jesus is the Truth, and Jesus has the Key to life the way God designed it to be. Only Jesus Christ can open life abundant. The faithful church at Philadelphia experienced the treasures of God, poured out through Christ.

He came to them and said I have the key, I can open God's riches to you, I can open God's Presence to you. I can give you an overflowing and abundant life.

What promises, what blessings, what truths: and they are all ours today.

May we like those in Philadelphia, live a life that survives the quakes of life by faithfully living for the Holy and True Son of God.

He has the Key of David. He unlocks life abundant. Follow Him and even loss we suffer becomes eternal gain.

That is the way to Quake Proof your life each day.