

## Philadelphia – The Faithful Church

Spilman Memorial Baptist Church

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Text: Revelation 3:7-16

Purpose: Jesus gives words of affirmation to the church at Philadelphia. He praises them for their works, gives them an open door of ministry, and strengthens them even though they are weak. They have been found faithful to his word and not denied his name. Jesus promises to crush the churches enemies and to keep them from the coming Tribulation. We are called to live our lives of faith in the same manner.



A passenger jet was suffering through a severe thunderstorm. As the passengers were being bounced around by the turbulence a young woman turned to a minister sitting next to her and with a nervous laugh asks, "Reverend, you're a man of God, can't you do something about this storm?"

To which he replies, "Lady, I'm in sales, not management."

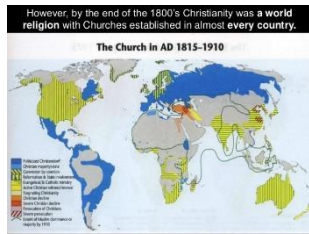
Today we come to the sixth church mentioned in the Book of Revelation – the church at Philadelphia. If I were living during the days in which John's letter was delivered, this is the church I would have wanted



to be affiliated with. Five of the churches that are listed in this passage of scripture received a strong rebuke from Jesus. Only two received a positive report. Philadelphia was one that was praised for their continued ministry in the Lord, for their brotherly love towards one another, and praised for being overcomers.

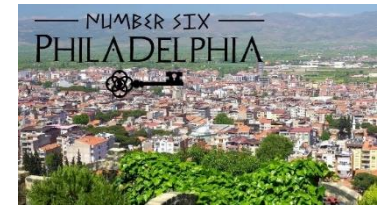
The Greek word *Philadelpheia* is almost identical to the city of Philadelphia. It is a word that means “brotherly love.” It is used seven times in the New Testament. Twice it is used in the Book of Revelation when it refers to the city, and five times when it refers to the word, “kindly affectionate” or “brotherly love.” (Romans 12:10, I Thess. 4:9, Hebrews 13:1, I Peter 1:22, 3:8, 2 Peter 1:7)

φιλαδελφία  
philadelphia / brotherly love



As I have mentioned before, each city mentioned in the Book of Revelation is representative of a period of time in history. Most people designate the Church at Philadelphia as representing the period of time, starting at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and continuing on until the future rapture of the church. This period has been marked by great missionary outreaches, revivals, and the advent of the Christian Education Movement (the birth of Sunday school). It was the era of Hudson Taylor, John Wesley, George Whitefield, Charles Haddon Spurgeon, D.L. Moody, and many more. The Salvation Army was founded and numerous mission agencies sprang up. This period of time in history has had unprecedented growth in missions.

When Jesus instructed John to write this letter, He identified the characteristics of being Holy, true, having the key of David, able to open and shut doors according to His will (3:7).



This demonstrates that Jesus is the preeminent, holy God, alone qualified to call the believers at Philadelphia to a life of faith in Him. Because Jesus is Holy, he is calling us to be holy as well. (I Peter 1:15) Jesus also describes Himself as true. This is probably in response to the Jews challenge that Jesus was a false teacher. I am so glad that we have a Savior that does what He says He will do and is what He says He is. He is the personification of truth. We live in a world filled with falsehoods. We can count on Jesus no matter what – because He is true.



Jesus also says He holds the “key of David.” The “key of David” mentioned in this passage of scripture takes us back to the Old Testament where Isaiah speaks of a coming Messiah.

“The key of the house of David, I will lay on his shoulder;  
So he shall open, and no one shall shut.  
And he shall shut, and no one shall open.  
I will fasten him as a peg in a sure place,  
And he will become a glorious throne to his father’s house.” (Is. 22:22-23)

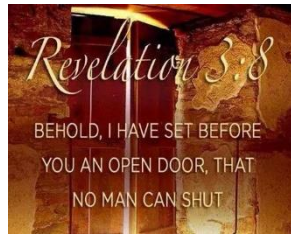
This reference not only applied to the future Messiah Jesus, it also applied to the present-day individual, Eliakim, who had the key to the king's treasury during Isaiah's day. There were great riches in the treasury of the king and one man held the key.

Jesus holds the entire treasury of God. He offers salvation and forgiveness. He offers blessings and healing. He is the one that can open doors. He is also the one in whom judgment and destruction will come for those that reject Jesus.

### An Open Door for Ministry

Jesus is telling Philadelphia that he will open the doors of the church and bless them. He is also warning the church, if they close themselves off from the open door, then Christ will close his treasures off and no one can obtain the blessings of Christ.

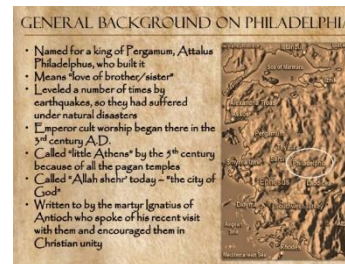
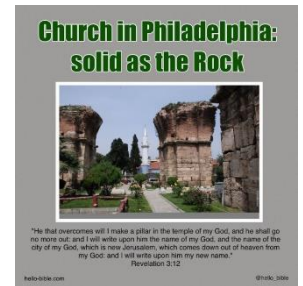
We as a church today need to hear that message. We need to be willing to bless others instead of hoarding. We need to be willing to trust God and allow his will to be done in this church. We need to let go of our selfish attitudes and closed mindedness. Christ wants to bless us, but some in this congregation are so closed off to change and innovation, that the Spirit has difficulty working here.



The church at Philadelphia had an open door set before them. The scripture is not very clear as to what the open door is referring to. In 1 Corinthians 16:8-9, Paul refers to an

“effective door” which has opened to him for ministry. In 2 Corinthians 2:12, Paul refers to a ministry opportunity in Troas. In Colossians 4:3 Paul prays for a “door for the word” to open. So an open door in Scripture is representative of an opportunity for ministry that God has set before a congregation.

Philadelphia was situated in an area where three regions come together; Lycia, Lydia, and Phrygia. The cities located 125 miles from the coast and built among four or five hills. It was first built in 140 B. C. by Philadelphia, the king of Pergamos. An earthquake in 17 A.D. destroyed most of the city. Later it was rebuilt with the assistance of Tiberius. Its name was changed to Neo-Caesarea, but reverted to Philadelphia under the reign of Nero. The reason the city was originally built was so it could be a gateway for the spread of Hellenism – that is the Greek language and Greek customs. In many ways, Philadelphia was the key to spreading the doctrine of Hellenism to the region. Philadelphia was in a strategic position to spread the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the central part of Asia Minor.



Emperor worship began there in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century.

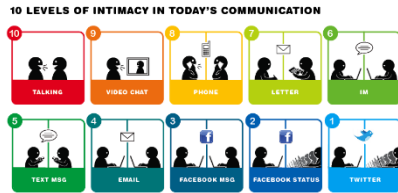
By the 5<sup>th</sup> century, it was known as “little Athens” due to all of the pagan temples located in the city.

Today this city is known as “Allah shehr” – which means “City of God.”

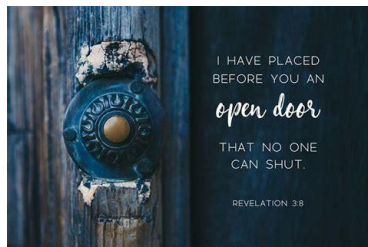
Ignatius of Antioch even spoke of the Christians located in this city. It became a central city for the spread of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Even today, we have untold ways in which the Gospel of Jesus Christ can be spread.

I was speaking with someone this past week and they were complaining about the many different ways communication can be



spread. Today you can put an ad in the newspaper, run an ad on the radio or television, send a letter through the post office, you can send an email, send a fax, send a text message, make a regular phone call on your land line phone at home or work, or through your cell phone, you can get messages and chat through your computer using Facebook or Messenger. You can learn more about others through a tweet, which is a message sent through Twitter (now known as x). Many celebrities and political leaders utilize “X” as a primary communication method therefore bypassing the traditional media. (So far, I have not opened an “X” account and gotten involved in tweeting or twittering!) Today, the Gospel message is being sent through all these forms of communication. We have a tremendous open door to share the Good News.



John Stott has said this about how a church should treat an open door for ministry.

“Christ has the keys and He opens the doors. Then let us not barge

our way unceremoniously through doors which are still closed. We must wait for Him to make openings for us. Damage is continually being done to the cause of Christ by rude or blatant testimony. It is indeed right to seek to win for Christ our friends and relatives at home and at work, but we are sometime in a greater hurry than God is. Be patient, pray hard, love much, and wait expectantly for the opportunity of witness. The same applies to our future. More mistakes are probably made by speed than by sloth, by impatience than by deleteriousness. God’s purposes often ripen slowly and if the door is shut, don’t put your shoulder to it. Wait till Christ takes out the key and opens it up.”

### Had a Little Strength

A second word of commendation from Jesus sounds like a criticism, but it is not. He said, “*You have little strength.*” It does not mean the church still has strength, it means they only have a little strength. For them to accomplish their mission, they will need to rely on an outside source. Paul says in 2 Corinthians 12:9, “*My grace (Jesus speaking) is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.*” If God is providing a ministry opportunity for a church, then the Lord will provide strength to walk through it.



## Faithful to the Word of God

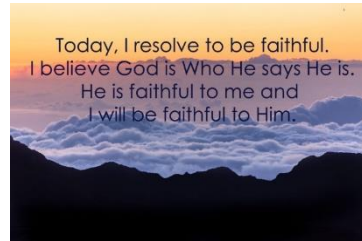


A third commendation to the church at Philadelphia was they were faithful to the word of God. They lived in a pagan region, that was promoting the religion of Rome, but the church remained faithful and pure in the midst of a God denying culture.

Don't we live in a God denying culture today? We should be encouraged, even if we have a little strength, we will be victorious if we remain faithful.

## Did Not Deny Jesus Christ

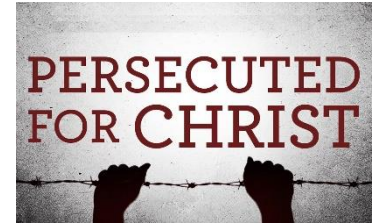
The last commendation they received was they did not deny their relationship with Christ.



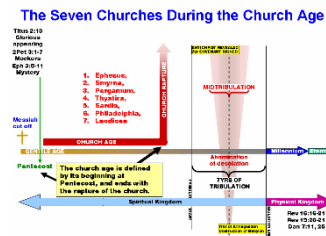
During John's day, Roman leader after Roman leader forced confessions out of individuals that caused them to deny Christ. But many remained faithful, even to the point of death. The formula for success for Philadelphia has been identified as four characteristics of a growing congregation. Don't we all want to be identified as a faithful church like Philadelphia? Those characteristics are:

1. They have identified an open door of ministry.
2. They depended on the Lord for strength.
3. They are committed to the Word of God.
4. They submit to the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

## Promises to the Church (3:9-13)



Jesus promises the church at Philadelphia two distinct promises. The first promise is related to those followers of the "synagogue of Satan." We saw in the letter to Smyrna, there was a group of Jews that rejected Jesus and actually worshipped the Roman gods. Jesus promised the believers at Philadelphia that these individuals would actually come and bow down at their feet. We read in the book of Acts of one person that had rejected Jesus, but later came to accept Him as Lord and Savior. That individual was Saul, who later became Paul, the most prolific writer of the New Testament. We also see in history, that the Roman Government that once persecuted Christians later made the Christian faith the only approved religion. Those that once bowed the knee to Zeus and Dionysus, now came and worshipped Christ.

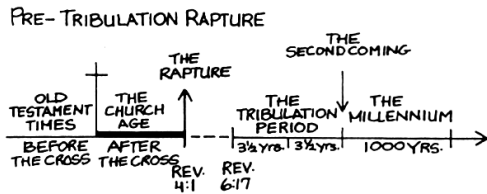


But Jesus also promised the believers at Philadelphia a great prophetic word which also applies to the larger Christian church. Verse ten tells us that Jesus will "keep them from the hour of trial that is coming upon the whole world." This is not talking about a local persecution. Rather the type of tribulation Jesus is referring to is a global, worldwide, judgment of the world at the hands of God. I want us to look at this prophetic word carefully.

The scripture says the church will be kept “from” the coming tribulation. Today there are primarily three different views as to when Christ will come and take his church to be with Him.

THE SEVEN SEALS OF REVELATION						
FIRST SEAL	SECOND SEAL	THIRD SEAL	FOURTH SEAL	FIFTH SEAL	SIXTH SEAL	SEVENTH SEAL
WHITE HORSE	RED HORSE	BLACK HORSE	PALE HORSE	MYRTLES CUT OFF	CELESTIAL SIGNS	RAPTURE
Rev 6:2 Had a Bow Given a Crown Went out Conquering	Rev 6:4 Peace Removed Violence Hunger and War Swept	Rev 6:5-6 Balance Scales Huge Inflation Oil & Wine Spared	Rev 6:8 Death has Ridden with him Vile death Killed with sword, famine, death & beasts	Rev 6:9-11 Martyrs cry out How long? How long number of brothers to be killed is complete	Rev 6:12-17 Earth quakes Sun darkens Mountains and Stars fall Who flees Who a scroll	Rev 6:1 Heaven silent about half hour Rev 11:2 Come up Here!

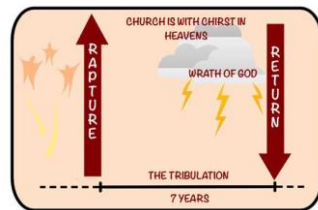
If you were to continue to read through the Book of Revelation, you will find that there will be a seven-year period of time where God will judge the world by seven different judgments. This first half of that time will be called the Tribulation, and the second half will be called the Great Tribulation. At the end of the seven years, there will be a thousand years (a millennium) where Christ will rule.



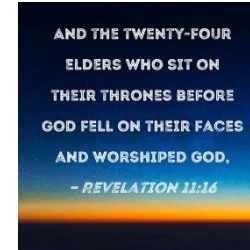
The first view is that the church will be raptured before the Tribulation begins. This view is known as Pre-tribulation. There are some that

believe the church will be raptured in the middle of the Tribulation. This is called Mid-tribulation. While some believe the church will actually go through the Tribulation. This view is called Post-tribulation.

As for my understanding of the scripture, I believe that the scripture teaches we will be kept “from” the coming Tribulation. I need to point out to you that the word church is used 19 times in the first 3 chapters in the Book of Revelation. But there is no further mentioning of the



church again on earth. If the church was going to go through these various judgments, then you would think it would have been mentioned a time or two. The reason I believe the scripture is silent about the church on earth during the tribulation is that the believers of Christ, will not be present on earth, they are in heaven when the Tribulation begins.



If you were to examine the 24 elders mentioned in Revelation, chapter four, you would come to understand they are representative of the church in heaven, not here on earth. It is therefore logical that the church is raptured between chapter three and four, and is a part of the great gathering worshipping Jesus around the Throne of God.

### Behold, I Come Quickly

Jesus reminded them of something we often forget. Christ is coming back to take His church to be with Him. Let me say it again, Christ is coming back to take His church to be with Him.



Do you believe that? Or does that scare you to death!? We need to be ready because Jesus said he was coming --- quickly! In the blink of an eye, Jesus could come. In the snap of a finger, He could be here. Before you take your next breath, He could be here; ready to take those that have accepted Him to be with Him for all eternity.



We are called to live our lives holy every day as if today were the day. We are called to give while we can because today

may be the day. We are called to be obedient today, for this day may be the day. He tarries not because He is slow or has forgotten us. He is waiting because He wants one more person to have their heart ready before He closes the books. There is a song written years ago by Larry Norman, titled "I Wish We'd All Been Ready." In that song, it says, "There's no time to change your mind, I wish we'd all been ready."

### **I Wish We'd All Been Ready**

by Larry Norman

Life was filled with guns and war  
And all of us got trampled on the floor

I wish we'd all been ready

Children died the days grew cold

A piece of bread could buy a bag of gold

I wish we'd all been ready

There's no time to change your mind

The Son has come and you've been left behind

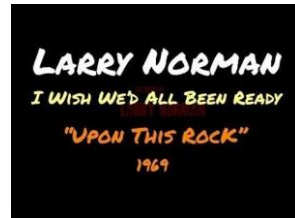
A man and wife asleep in bed  
She hears a noise and turns her head he's gone

I wish we'd all been ready

Two men walking up a hill

One disappears and one's left standing still

I wish we'd all been ready



There's no time to change your mind  
The Son has come and you've been left behind

Children died the days grew cold  
A piece of bread could buy a bag of gold  
I wish we'd all been ready

There's no time to change your mind  
The Son has come and you've been left behind

The Father spoke the demons died  
How could you have been so blind

There's no time to change your mind  
The Son has come and you've been left behind

You've been left behind  
You've been left behind  
You've been left behind

I am here to tell you there is still time to turn to God, repent from your rebellious ways, and seek His face. We as individuals need to live ready. We as a church need to be willing to move forward with the open doors of ministry in our area while there is still time.

### **The Direction for Us**

I sense there are individuals in this church that want to serve the Lord with their giftedness. We need to release these individuals to do ministry here and not hold them back. We may have a little strength, but that is exactly where we need to be –



totally dependent upon God to hear our prayer and keep doors of ministry open. Our little strength is made big in God. Big opportunities and little strength is God's recipe for victory and a great future.

As God opens doors for us as a congregation, we don't need to fear. We need to trust God and move forward through those open doors and minister to others in the name of Jesus. We are promised a place in the New Jerusalem if we are faithful overcomers.

*“He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”*

**LET US PRAY**