



7. An Open Door (Rev 3:7-15)

What has the Dime bar got in common with soft cream cheese¹? Answer Kraft who make the Dime as well as Philadelphia cream cheese.

We are continuing our tour of the seven churches of Asia this morning. We have passed from the coast and went inland to the cities of Thyatira and Sardis and now we arrive at Philadelphia - the city of brotherly love - because that's what the name means. It got a namesake in America which is famous and the soft cheese was named after Philadelphia.

The original city of Philadelphia was named after the two kings (who were brothers) responsible for getting the city reconstructed after a disastrous earthquake in AD19. In fact the cit had a few names down its history, but Philadelphia was the name in use when John posted his letter.

Philadelphia was not the most important city of the seven - in fact, it was probably the least. Its only economic significance was that it was on a major trading route - a gateway from inland Asia Minor to the ports at Ephesus and Smyrna.

And as we read about the church in Philadelphia, we find that it does not sound impressive. Jesus said "*I know that you have little strength*". But on the other hand, like Smyrna, Jesus has no criticism of them at all. In fact, His words are of compliment, promise and assurance. *I know that you have little strength, yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name. 9 I will make those who are of the synagogue of Satan, who claim to be Jews though they are not, but are liars--I will make them come and fall down at your feet and acknowledge that I have loved you. 10 Since you have kept my command to endure patiently, I will also keep you from the hour of trial that is going to come upon the whole world to test those who live on the earth.*

Jesus, as usual, drives a coach and horses through the conventions that people have created. The churches that are great aren't necessarily the ones with the biggest congregations, the richest bank balances, the best reputations and the like. In fact, most of the others we looked at were big rich churches who boasted reputation. But that isn't what the risen Christ values. What does He value? *You have kept my word and have not denied my name.* Incidentally, the only other church that Jesus compliments is a church of poverty where Jesus encourages them to stay faithful as they have been.

So, the Philadelphians may have felt weak as a church, but they were people of obedience and integrity. And Jesus presents Himself as the One *who is holy and true*. We've heard similar to this before. How people rate spiritual health isn't the same as how Jesus rates it. He is the one who is holy and true and he requires of us to be holy and true.

This is an encouragement to us as we read this. For weeks now I've focused on what can be negative in our church. And as a small church, I guess hearing things which we might relate to is depressing. So here's encouragement for you. Jesus tells us what He finds commendable in a church so that we may follow on - we keep His word and do not deny Him.

The Philadelphians were under that pressure to deny Him. It seems that they may have had Jews in their congregation. Like the Smyrnans, they were opposed by the Jews of the "synagogue of satan". They were Jews who were opposed to Christ. Let's make a distinction. Israel may be chosen of God as an earthly nation, but the eternal promises of God are only in Christ. Jews rejecting Christ are of "the synagogue of satan". Possibly the believers in Philadelphia had been expelled from the local synagogue. Certainly the Jews were giving them a hard time.

We are fortunate in this land that persecution is rare, but it's getting more common. But maybe there are a few of us that are coming under pressure from other people because we want to follow Jesus.

1 See previous sermon – Sardis: the Dime Bar Church

They laugh when we say we are believers. Neighbours who are suspicious of us. People who want to pick holes in our lives because they know we are believers. We've all faced it at some point in our lives.

And how have we felt? For young people as they get into their mid-teens, it makes them want to give up. Maybe you're a lot older and you've felt the same. Yet we are called to be faithful.

For some people, denial is just having become cool towards the things of God. Perhaps situations in life have disappointed you and you've felt that your faith has been shaken.

Here were people who were weak, but they were faithful. Perhaps this morning you feel you are a weak Christian? You look at others and see all the things that they do in the Church or wherever and think you are weak. Well see here what weakness and strength is. You don't have to be strong to function as a believer - just faithful. We're all different and with different abilities. Yet Jesus honours faithfulness not works. It's an essential principle of the Christian faith.

And as we look at his passage, we see a Saviour who vindicates those who are faithful to Him. *11 I am coming soon. Hold on to what you have, so that no one will take your crown. He who overcomes I will make a pillar etc.* Last time I mentioned how that *overcomers* or *conquerors* comes in every one of these letters. Who are they? The ones who faithfully hold on to what they have and let no-one take their crown. So how does Jesus vindicate them?

- The persecutors will be the ones that bow down

The Jews considered themselves God's chosen own and that the Gentiles would be bowing down to them. But we see a reverse here. They were the ones that would be bowing down to the "weak" Philadelphians. *I will make those who are of the synagogue of Satan, who claim to be Jews though they are not, but are liars--I will make them come and fall down at your feet and acknowledge that I have loved you.*

Wilcock – These Jews claimed falsely to be the true people of God. The reality of the situation was the reverse of what the Philadelphians thought – the Jews will fall at their feet. "They will have to acknowledge that I have loved you"

Remember that one day, those that laugh at your faith and look down on you for the fact you're a Christian will one day bow before the risen Christ. Jesus and His people will be vindicated – they can't get away with it forever. Remember that and remember who you are in Christ. And let's pray for their salvation too.

- Kept from Testing

10 Since you have kept my command to endure patiently, I will also keep you from the hour of trial that is going to come upon the whole world to test those who live on the earth.

This is an interesting verse. Here we have a promise that they will be kept from the hour of trial. Some people interpret it as to do with the last days, but Jesus was addressing the Philadelphians then. We don't know which major problem He was referring to. What we do know is that their faithfulness in enduring patiently, that they were saved from it. There is a sense in which the Bible never promises we will be kept safe from all the problems and difficulties of the world – as we shall see in a moment we have eternal promises. But it is true that God honours those that honour Him.

- Recipients of eternal promises

I know your deeds. See, I have placed before you an open door that no one can shut. These are the words of him who is holy and true, who holds the key of David. What he opens no one can shut, and what he shuts no one can open. 8 I know your deeds. See, I have placed before you an open door that no one can shut

12 Him who overcomes I will make a pillar in the temple of my God. Never again will he leave it. I will write on him the name of my God and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which is coming down out of heaven from my God; and I will also write on him my new name. 13 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

The “weak” Philadelphians got a promise that none of the others did. Despite some of the things they did, the other churches were “strong”, particularly Ephesus.. But only Philadelphia had the

Perhaps Jesus used the word "weak" in a tongue in cheek way. Everyone thought they were weak - but in fact they are the recipients of the promise. Here we get a wonderful picture of Jesus as the one who had the key to a door he was holding open for them. The reference to the keys of David takes us back to Isaiah 22 and to a prophecy that Isaiah made about a man called Eliakim who God was going to use to replace Shebna as King Hezekiah's treasurer and he says this:

20 And it shall come to pass in that day, that I will call my servant Eliakim the son of Hilkiah: 21 And I will clothe him with thy robe, and strengthen him with thy girdle, and I will commit thy government into his hand: and he shall be a father to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and to the house of Judah. 22 And the key of the house of David will I lay upon his shoulder; so he shall open, and none shall shut; and he shall shut, and none shall open. 23 And I will fasten him as a nail in a sure place; and he shall be for a glorious throne to his father' house. 24 And they shall hang upon him all the glory of his father' house, the offspring and the issue, all vessels of small quantity, from the vessels of cups, even to all the vessels of flagons. (KJV)

This man had the authority over Jerusalem and over Judah. He was given massive authority. And it was Eliakim who had the authority to allow or not allow people into Jerusalem. And we see Jesus with the keys of David. His is the authority as to who should go in, or not go into the city. What city? *Him who overcomes I will make a pillar in the temple of my God. Never again will he leave it. I will write on him the name of my God and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which is coming down out of heaven from my God; and I will also write on him my new name.* We know which city - the new Jerusalem. It's an eternal picture. Jesus is the gatekeeper. He has the keys that allow people into the right places. Just as Eliakim had the keys of David for the gates to Jerusalem, Jesus has the keys to the gates of the new Jerusalem.

Geoffrey Beasley Murray notes that the Jews from the “synagogue of satan” were saying - you are excluded from the kingdom; it is for us Jews. But it's JESUS who decided who is part of the kingdom. He has the keys to the New Jerusalem.

The wonderful news for the Philadelphians was the promise that Jesus was holding the door open for them. Why? Because they were people who had kept the word and not denied their Lord. Fred Tatford once said: *“The battle grows wearisome and the race seems long. The burdens weigh heavier and the road becomes rougher. But He is coming quickly! Soon faith will give place to sight; the weariness, the toil, and the struggle will then be over and we shall be with Him who our souls adore. Until that blessed moment, He exhorts His people to ‘hold fast’.*

The message of Philadelphia is this: if we want to please our Saviour, the we keep His word and don't deny Him. As we come around the Lord's table, let's affirm again who He is, find forgiveness where we have denied Him or not done His word and commit ourselves afresh to hang in there and persevere in our faith.

Prayer

*Preached by Mark Reid
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Scripture quotes NIV unless
otherwise stated.*