

Spiritual Maturity

The Church in Philadelphia: The Faithful Church

- The city of Philadelphia was founded in 189 B.C. by King Emends the brother of Atallus King of Pergamus.
- It was widely known that these brothers had deep love for one another.
- Thus, the names “Philadelphus”- the city of brotherly love!
- It is the “youngest” of the seven cities Jesus wrote to.
- Philadelphia was also called “Little Athens” because of the many pagan temples and worship that took place in the city.
- Because of the lack of a royal heir to the throne, Philadelphia was bequeathed to Rome in 133 B.C., thus becoming part of the Roman Empire.
- In 17 A.D. Philadelphia experienced a catastrophic earthquake that rocked the entire region!
- It was so devastating that Rome exempted them from taxes for 5 years!
- The people of Philadelphia were expecting more and were devastated and felt neglected and betrayed by their leaders!!
- Through years of hardship Philadelphia simply could not recover and pay what was owed to Rome, so Rome seized people and property. Caesar demanded Philadelphia destroy their vineyards so as to not compete Rome and their wine production.
- Philadelphia went from prosperous and influential to just another city “along the highway!”
- Since the modern Turkish city of Alasehir is built over the city of Philadelphia it makes archeological exploration very difficult!
- Only a small portion of the ancient city has been discovered or explored!
- Today, Alasehir is a city of approximately 110,000 residents.
- Many of the statements Jesus made to the Church in Philadelphia can be fully understood in context of their experiences in daily life of the city!
- As with all of us.....our contexts and experiences are uniquely ours!!!!

Let's learn from the letter to Philadelphia!

Revelation 3:7-13 (NIV)

7 “To the angel of the church in Philadelphia write:

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. 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 on the whole world to test the inhabitants of the earth. 11 I am coming soon. Hold on to what you have, so that no one will take your crown. 12 The one who is victorious I will make a pillar in the temple of my God. Never again will they leave it. I will write on them 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 them my new name. 13 Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

I. The important thing to remember as we progress from city to city and letter to letter is that these were not letters from John!

A. Look at verse 7!

“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.”

1. First think about this!!!
2. In the midst of all this persecution and difficulty...I get a letter from Jesus!!!!!!
3. How encouraging that must have been to know that you are not being forgotten!!!!
4. BUT YET, John wrote this! Could this be a lesson for us??
5. Do we hold, at value, the scriptures written for us!! Yes, they are penned by human hands, but they are inspired by God. They are literally “God-breathed!”

B. The very first words of Jesus to the Church in Philadelphia are very telling of their circumstances and are abundantly encouraging!!!!

1. Notice first Jesus’ reference to Himself! He is revealing His authority!! In other words, these are not just any ‘ol words!
2. Jesus refers to Himself as “He who holds the key of David!!”
3. This is a direct reference to the Messianic prophecy in Isaiah!

Isaiah 22:22 (NIV)

22 I will place on his shoulder the key to the house of David; what he opens no one can shut, and what he shuts no one can open.

4. He is saying that He is the promised Messiah and He has all authority and can accomplish what He wishes.
5. They had just gotten A LETTER FROM GOD!!

C. What is interesting here is an occurrence that was going on at the time.

1. As in other cities, the Jews had made an agreement with Rome that exempted them from Caesar worship and other pagan practices.
2. Early Christians were considered a “sect of Judaism” so they generally met in synagogues for corporate meetings and in homes to worship and pray.
3. As the teachings of the Resurrected Christ became prevalent the Jews began to persecute the Christians and distance themselves from them!
4. They were thrown out of the synagogues and then were victim of further persecution from Rome!!!
5. Their names were marked off the roll and the door was shut so they could not enter. They would knock only to be turned away!
6. So can you imagine what Jesus’ words meant to them??

Revelation 3:8 (NIV)

8 I have placed before you an open door that no one can shut.

II. We should all be thankful for the next words Jesus spoke!!

A. After He has expressed and described His authority over our lives
He says...

Revelation 3:8

8 I know that you have little strength, yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name.

1. Do you ever feel like you simply DO NOT have the strength to deal with what life throws at you?? We all do!
2. We spend way too much time trying to be strong! We even say that to one another and we mean well when we do.
3. The thing about being a Christian is that we are never asked to be strong! To “suck it up!” We are told...
 - a) The Lord will empower.
 - b) He will live in and through us.
 - c) Our lives are hidden with Christ in God.
 - d) Our lives are not our own.
 - e) Yes, we live, but it is Christ Who lives in us!

Ephesians 6:10-17 (NIV)

10 Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. 11 Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. 12 For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. 13 Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. 14 Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, 15 and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. 16 In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. 17 Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

B. Jesus then says something incredible in verse 9!

Revelation 3:9 (NIV)

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.

1. That is poetic language of antiquity for, “You will rise above the circumstances of life.”
2. Regardless of what life throws at you, the “Christ in you” is bigger!
3. A direct application to Philadelphia was of course that their persecutors and religious hypocrites would one day recognize the goodness of God!

III. Jesus makes one last statement to the Church in Philadelphia!

A. He said to hold on to their faith in Jesus Christ and it would end well!!!

Revelation 3:12 (NIV)

12 The one who is victorious I will make a pillar in the temple of my God. Never again will they leave it. I will write on them 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 them my new name.

B. What is this reference to “being a pillar” in God’s Temple?

1. Is it like being the “pillar of the community?”
2. A “pillar in the church?”
3. Does it mean that you are someone who “holds it all together?”

C. You recall from Philadelphia and other cities that this region was very prone to earthquakes.

1. The Greeks had incredible earthquake technology for their time.
2. One would think the safest place in an earthquake at that time would be outside. Away from the falling stone and pillars of buildings.
3. It was actually the opposite!! Their design and technology had developed so much because they literally lived in “earthquake zones.”
4. It was well known that the safest place to be during a quake was inside one of the many temples of pagan worship.
5. Jesus is saying, “You are not only in a safe place as believers,” but “you can become a safe place for your brothers and sisters around you when their life starts quaking!”

D. Then Jesus said He would “write on them His new name!”

1. Remember how we talked about the names of early Christians being stricken from synagogue roles?
2. How this made them vulnerable to persecution from the Romans and the Jews? How they were ostracized?
3. Jesus is saying, “I will write you on my role!” “I’ll give you My name to use!”

Ephesians 2:19-22 (NIV)

19 You are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God’s people and also members of his household, 20 built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. 21 In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. 22 And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.

