

# To The Church

## Letters from the book of Revelation

### Faithful Like Philadelphia

In our study on the first century churches so far, we have seen that there were no perfect churches and that, despite their inadequacy, Christ loved, led and warned them. This serves as a great encouragement to us, as the church in our generation, with all of our flaws and imperfections.

In today's text, we look at the church in the City of Philadelphia. Philadelphia was known for its commercial importance, but it was not densely populated because it was built on a fault line. It had a very small group of Christians, and yet it was the only church of the seven mentioned in Revelation, that Christ commended for its deeds and faithfulness, without any accompanying critique. It was also the church that survived the longest. By the 1300's, none of the other six churches existed, but this little church continued faithfully until they were eventually martyred for their faith. We can learn from their consistent faithfulness, and ensure that we too leave a legacy for future generations in this city (Longman, 2013).

### Today's Text - Revelation 3:7-13

#### 1. Churches That Last Trust In The Work Of King Jesus

- Read Revelation 3:7

Jesus started by reminding the church of who he was by saying that he was the:

- Holy one (divine) – in the face of persecution by the Jews, who taught that Jesus was a sinner who was rightfully executed, the church needed to be reminded that Jesus was God.
- True one - in a Hellenistic environment where truth was debated and fought for, and where they belittled the teaching of Christ's kingdom, the church needed to know that Jesus was the truth. Not only were his words true, but his very essence was truth that they could fully rely on.
- Saving one – the church had been kicked out of the synagogue, and had been vehemently opposed by the Jewish community there. Christ assured them that, even though they were struggling deeply with their current circumstances, it would not determine their ability to come to God because Christ himself held the key to God's presence.

In our culture, out of the three reminders above, we probably most need the one which reminds us that Jesus is the truth because we are confronted with so many other options for "truth" all of the time.

Q. What are some of the alternatives to the truth that are we hearing from culture at the moment? (Consider one cultural lie that you find very difficult not to believe?)

Q. Are any of you going through a tough time (some sort of persecution) for your belief in, and pursuit of, Christ? If so, why is it helpful to know that Jesus reminds us that *he* is the saving one, and that it is he alone who holds the keys to the Father's presence?

#### 2. Churches That Last Know That We Can Respond With Seemingly Small Acts Of Faithfulness To God's Big Faithfulness in Salvation

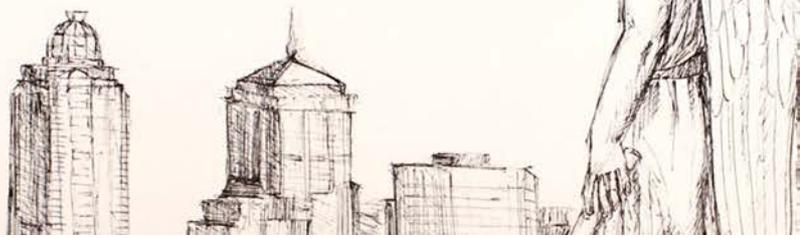
- Read Revelation 3:8

Jesus knew that this church was weak and not influential, and yet he commended them for their faithfulness. He did not look down on them because of their powerlessness, but entrusted them with opportunities for the gospel by opening "doors". One opportunity that they used well was to use their strategic location to send people to minister the gospel along the trade routes.

Q. Why is it encouraging that God knows about our weaknesses and yet is still willing to use us to build his kingdom?

Q. Why is it important for us to recognize the difference between being weak/powerless and passive in the building of God's kingdom?

Q. What one opportunity has God put before you that you have not previously seen as an "open door" for the gospel, and that you are now seeing for the first time? Explain why you feel this is an open door, and what it might look like for you to step out.



# To The Church

## Letters from the book of Revelation

### 3. **Churches That Last Believe That A Day Is Coming When The Love of God Will Be Fully Revealed**

- Read Revelation 3:9-10

It is amazing to think that not only did God see this church's incredibly difficult circumstances, he also promised to make everything right in the end. This promise holds true for all believers who are scorned, rejected, ignored and humiliated in this life, on account of following Christ. On the Day of Judgment, God's love for his church will be made known, and his justice will be brought down upon the wicked.

### 4. **Churches That Last Eagerly Anticipate the Eternal Rewards for Temporary Faithfulness**

- Read Revelation 3:11-13

In this text, Jesus highlights the temporary nature of the church's suffering, and reminds them that he will return to make all things right again. He also highlights that the temporary nature of things will be replaced by an eternal nature. In this life, they would experience suffering, but in eternity they would have a crown instead. In this life, they would be rejected, but in the life to come they would never be rejected, but instead would remain in God's presence.

- Q. Why do you think Christ reminded this church of his love and justice, which were to be fully revealed in the future?  
Q. Why is it so hard for us to persevere when we are scorned, rejected, ignored and humiliated for our faith in Christ?  
Q. Why does the promise of justice and love in the future build our faith? Is this something that personally encourages you (explain your answer)?

### **Bibliography**

(2013). Philadelphia. In Longman, *The Baker Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (p. 1312). Michigan: BakerBooks.

