

THE CHURCH OF PHILADELPHIA

Rev. 3:7–13

The Church of Philadelphia was one of two churches that received only commendation and no critique from the Lord Jesus. **The outstanding characteristic of the Philadelphian believers was their faithfulness amidst persecution to reach out to unbelievers with the Gospel of Jesus Christ.**

Unique Characteristics of the Ancient City of Philadelphia



The ancient city of Philadelphia is located in modern Turkey. The site of the ancient city is the dark colored rise of land in the center of the photo. Philadelphia was situated on the main route of the postal system from Rome to the eastern provinces of the empire and was called “the gateway to the East.” Grapes flourished in this area because of the rich, volcanic soil; the down side being that Philadelphia sat on a geological fault, and in 17 B.C. was destroyed by a severe earthquake that also destroyed Sardis and ten other cities. Afterward, some of the citizens refused to move back into the city and remained in the surrounding countryside, which they called “the burnt land.”

Philadelphia was situated where the borders of Mysia, Lydia and Phrygia met. It was established for the purpose of spreading Greek culture and language to Lydia and Phrygia; and so well did it do its work that by A.D. 19 the Lydians had forgotten their own Lydian language and were all but Greeks. Now, in 96 A.D., Jesus has opened a door of ministry for the Philadelphian Church to reach these same peoples with the Good News of salvation.

The Description of Jesus (3:7)

Revelation 3:7 (ESV)

⁷ “And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write: ‘The words of the holy one, the true one, who has the key of David, who opens and no one will shut, who shuts and no one opens.’

Jesus presents Himself as the *holy one* which is a title by which God the Father refers to Himself in Isaiah 40:25. By using this title Jesus is asserting His deity; He is equal with God the Father.

He is the *true one* meaning that He is the one who corresponds to reality. Unlike the hundreds of false gods and goddesses who were nothing but the figments of men’s imaginations (1 Cor. 8:5-6), Jesus is real.

To what does *the key of David* refer?

The background of this imagery is Isaiah 22:15–25. Invaded by Assyria, the Jewish leaders of Judah turned, not to God, but to Egypt to deliver the nation. One of these leaders, corrupt Shebna, was abusing his position for private gain. God removed Shebna and in his place put Eliakim and gave Eliakim the *key of the house of David* meaning authority over the treasuries and resources of the King. Eliakim was a picture of Jesus, a trustworthy administrator of the affairs of God’s people. Jesus also has the keys of (authority over) hades and death (Rev. 1:18).

In the New Testament, an *open door* refers to an opportunity for ministry (Acts 14:27; 1 Cor. 16:9; 2 Cor. 2:12; Col. 4:3). Jesus had opened an opportunity for ministry and the Philadelphians were faithfully taking advantage of the *open door*.

Opportunities and Obstacles (3:8-9)

Revelation 3:8 (ESV)

⁸ “I know your works. Behold, I have set before you an open door, which no one is able to shut. I know that you have but little power, and yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name. ⁹ Behold, I will make those of the synagogue of Satan who say that they are Jews and are not, but lie—behold, I will make them come and bow down before your feet, and they will learn that I have loved you.

Opportunities (3:8a)

Exercising His divine authority, Jesus opened a door of ministry for the church to preach the Word and reach out to the lost with the Gospel.

Obstacles (3:8b-9)

But little power... Apparently, the Church of Philadelphia was not a large or a strong church; however, it was a faithful one. Though opposed by Jewish members of the community, the Philadelphian believers held true to God's Word and to Jesus as Savior and Lord. If Jesus gave them an open door, then He would see to it that they were able to walk through it!

Those of the synagogue of Satan... The second obstacle was the opposition of the Jews in the city. This was really the opposition of Satan, for we do not battle against flesh and blood (Eph. 6:12). These people may have been Jews ethnically, but they were not "true Israel" in the New Testament sense (Rom. 2:17-29).

How were these Jews opposing the church at Philadelphia? Jesus does not tell us specifically but it is possible that one form of opposition was exclusion of the Jewish believers from the synagogue. Another means was probably false accusation, for this is the way the unbelieving Jews often attacked the Apostle Paul (Acts 21:27-28, 24:1-9). The church at Smyrna faced the same kind of opposition (Rev. 2:9).

The believers in Philadelphia were in a similar situation to that of Paul when he wrote 1 Corinthians 16:9

⁹ *for a wide door for effective work has opened to me, and there are many adversaries.*

Unbelief focuses on the obstacles, but faith focuses on the opportunities! Jesus holds the keys, He is in control of the outcome! Nobody can close the doors as long as He keeps them open.

Promises (3:9-12)**Revelation 3:9-12 (ESV)**

⁹ Behold, I will make those of the synagogue of Satan who say that they are Jews and are not, but lie—behold, I will make them come and bow down before your feet, and they will learn that I have loved you. ¹⁰ Because you have kept my word about patient endurance, I will keep you from the hour of trial that is coming on the whole world, to try those who dwell on the earth. ¹¹ I am coming soon. Hold fast what you have, so that no one may seize your crown. ¹² The one who conquers, I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God. Never shall he go out of it, and 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 from my God out of heaven, and my own new name.

Jesus will take care of their enemies (3:9)

Some day, in the future, the Jews opposing the Gospel ministry of the Church will be made by Jesus to bow in humility and confess before the believers that their message of God's love in Christ Jesus is true!

Jesus will keep the Church from the Tribulation (3:10-11)

This is a reference to the time of Tribulation that John describes in Revelation 6-19. This is not referring to a local trial because it is coming *on the whole world to try those who dwell on the earth* (for similar phraseology see Rev. 6:10; 8:13; 11:10; 12:12; 13:8, 12, 14; 14:6; 17:2, 8). This is the Great Tribulation that will encompass the entire earth before Jesus returns to establish His kingdom. This is a promise that the Church will not go through the Tribulation, but, by means of the Rapture, will be taken to heaven before it begins (1 Thes. 4:13-5:11). *I am coming soon* indicates Jesus could come at any time; there are no prophecies that need to be fulfilled in order for the Rapture to occur. *Hold fast... so that no one may seize your crown* is a reference to the Judgment Seat of Christ that occurs in heaven directly following the rapture of the Church to heaven (1 Cor. 3:10-15; 2 Cor. 5:1-10). Faithful service will be rewarded by a variety of crowns. The admonition is to faithful service undeterred by persecutors who might otherwise cause them to lose their reward.

Jesus will honor them (3:12)

The symbolism of stability would be especially meaningful to the Philadelphians who lived in constant danger of earthquakes. Ancient cities often honored their heroes by erecting pillars with their names inscribed on them. There is no temple in the New Jerusalem because God the Almighty and Jesus the Lamb are its temple. Those believers who faithfully serve and reach out to the lost even in the face of persecution will be honored in the New Jerusalem. Like pillars in the Temple, they will live in stability and honor, bearing the names of God, the New Jerusalem and the new name of Jesus – the Ultimate Conqueror.

REFLECTION**1. Jesus opens and closes doors of ministry.**

Is it possible for a church or a person to be “forcing” a ministry to which Jesus has not opened the door?

How do we as a church discern when Jesus has opened a door to us and when He has closed a door to us?

What examples / experiences do you have of Jesus opening a door of ministry for Grace Community Church or another church at which you have served?

2. The *door of ministry* refers primarily to evangelism - sharing the way of salvation with those who are unsaved.

Do you feel prepared to share the way of salvation with someone who is unsaved?

What are the biggest obstacles to sharing Christ with those who are not yet saved?

Will you consider attending the evangelism training courses we will be providing in 2014?