Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

Philadelphia: The Faithful Church, Part 1
Scripture: Revelation 3:7
Code: 66-12

Open your Bible to Revelation chapter 3 and we are looking at verses 7 to 13, the letter from the Lord Jesus to the church in the city of Philadelphia. In our study of this section of letters to the churches, these churches in cities in ancient Asia Minor, we have learned that each one of the churches was unique. Each of these churches had distinguishing marks. Because of that, each provides for us a sample of the kind of churches that exist throughout all the history of the church. As I have reminded you every time, these were real cities with real churches...but also they set for us seven samples of kinds of churches and thus our instructive for the church throughout all of its history.

For example, we've seen a church which fought valiantly against error, fought against heresy, hated evil, but was condemned for a lack of love. We've seen a church which exhibited love only to be condemned for a lack of sound doctrine and a tolerance of sin. We've seen a church spiritually alive in every way only to be killed physically, martyred for Christ. We've seen a church physically alive in every way only to be spiritually killed by sin. We've seen a church that thought it was poor but God says it is rich. In our next study we will see a church that thought it was rich but God says it's poor, destitute of holy things.

And so we've seen all different kinds of churches. And they can portray for us the way the church always is. There are those churches known for their stand on sound doctrine but without love. There are those churches known for their love without sound doctrine. There are those churches that fight against evil. There are those churches that tolerate evil. There are those churches that are spiritually alive and suffer for their testimony. There are those churches that are spiritually dead and suffer nothing because no one persecutes a dead church. There are those churches that think they have very little but they have a lot. And those who think they have a lot and have nothing.

Now in the study for tonight we come to a church that was faithful. Along with the letter to the church in Smyrna over in chapter 2 verse 8, this letter, chapter 3 verse 7, to Philadelphia is written to a church that needs no warning, that needs no chastening, that needs no threatening because here you have a true church. Two of the seven churches have nothing condemning them in the letter because they are the regenerate church. The church at Smyrna, the church at Philadelphia were faithful, godly, loyal, effective. And we see these two churches as the models throughout all of church history of good, solid, regenerate, faithful churches.

I don't want to make a point that really isn't here but it does strike me that the blood-bought, redeemed, saved church is in a chaotic mixture. Did you notice that? Only two out of seven, only two

out of seven were completely faithful. Now if that's some kind of a typical percentage, then the weak, sinful church is the more common church. But this church is a blessing. Let's read the letter.

Verse 7, "To the angel, or the messenger, of the church in Philadelphia, write: He who is holy, who is true, who has the key of David, who opens and no one will shut and who shuts and no one opens, says this, I know your deeds. Behold, I have put before you an open door which no one can shut because you have a little power and have kept My Word and have not denied My name. Behold, I will cause those of the synagogue of Satan who say they are Jews and are not, but lie, behold, I will make them come and bow down at your feet and know that I have loved you, because you have kept the word of My perseverance, I also will keep you from the hour of testing, that hour which is about to come upon the whole world to test those who dwell upon the earth. I'm coming quickly. Hold fast what you have in order that no one take your crown. He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God and he will not go out from it anymore. And I will write upon him the name of My God and the name of the city of My God, the new Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God and My new name. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."

Letter number six carried by messenger number six, here designated by the term "angel," angelos, which means messenger. As I told you, this group of seven men left John on the isle of Patmos carrying these letters back to the seven churches along with the whole book of the Revelation of Jesus Christ. And as they reached their cities, the group became smaller. Now there are only two left and after this letter is delivered there's only one left to deliver his letter to the final church at Laodicea.

As this letter is given, it is given to a faithful church. Always these letters identify the correspondent, first of all. Let's look at that in verse 7. "He who is holy, who is true, who has the key of David, who opens and no one will shut and who shuts and no one opens, says this."

The Lord never introduces Himself by simply using His name. He never says, "I the Lord Jesus Christ say this." He always introduces Himself with a description of His character, a description of His person. Up until this point, every description has been drawn out of chapter 1. Every description in the initial note of each letter has come out of chapter 1, something that described in chapter 1 is pulled in to chapter 2 and 3 to describe Him again, until now. Here we have the letter that does not draw its description of the writer, who is the Lord Jesus, from chapter 1. This is a unique description. It fits this faithful church. It has four distinct elements. It is very Hebrew. It is very Old Testament in its nature.

First of all, verse 7 introduces the correspondent, the Lord Jesus, the one who writes, the author as "He who is holy." Now this refers to no other than God. Such absolute holiness belongs to God and God alone. If you go back into the Old Testament you see this. God repeatedly is identified as the

One who is holy, thinking most of Isaiah chapter 6 because it's so familiar. We read these words, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts." His attribute of holiness being repeated three times...perhaps to emphasize that attribute which is most inimitable to His character. He is called the holy One in many passages. Isaiah 40:25, Isaiah 43:15, Psalm 16:10, Habakkuk 3:3 He is called the holy One. This identifies Him as absolutely sinless, absolutely unstained, unblemished, flawless.

In Revelation 4:8 if you take the trip in chapter 4 into heaven you'll hear the four living creatures and they say this, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God, the Almighty." Clearly then it is the character of God that is described as holy. He is holy. What does it mean? Separate. From what? Sin. The word holy means separate and He is utterly separate from sin, thus He is utterly unlike us.

To take that a step further, this is also a common title for the Messiah. In Mark, for example, chapter 1 we read that Jesus in verse 21 went in to Capernaum and He began to teach and He entered into the synagogue. They were amazed at His teaching. He was teaching as one having authority, not like the scribes. Verse 23 of Mark 1, "Just then there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit." Here's a demon-possessed guy and he screams, and this is what he says, "What do we have to do with You, Jesus of Nazareth? Have You come to destroy us?" And he's speaking on behalf of other demons. And then he says this, "I know who You are, the holy One of God." Even the demons know His messianic title. He is the holy One of God.

In Luke 1, quite another testimony, this One not from a demon but from Mary. Mary talking to the angel and asking, "How can this be because I'm a virgin? How can I have a child?" And Mary came to believe and affirm what the angel said, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of the Most High will overshadow you and for that reason the holy offspring shall be called the Son of God." The demons call Him the holy One. The fallen angels call Him the holy One. The holy angels called Him the holy One and Mary, of course, affirmed it.

In John's gospel, chapter 6, toward the end of that long chapter in verse 69, Simon Peter says, "We have believed and come to know that You are the holy One of God." We find this repeated as well in the book of Acts where Jesus the Messiah is designated as the holy One. Peter says in Acts 3:14 to the Jews, condemning them, "You disowned the holy and righteous One and asked for a murderer to be granted to you. You chose Barabbas over the holy One. And so it goes.

Jesus identifying Himself as the holy One then is saying I am God. The Lord Jesus shares the holy, sinless, pure nature of God. He is God. He is God the holy One. Because He is holy, listen carefully, He can't tolerate sin. First Peter 1:15, "But the holy One who called you says be holy yourselves in all your behavior." The holy One demands holiness. He can't tolerate sin. That's fascinating to me. Why? Because He introduces Himself as the holy One and obviously He is separate from sin, cannot tolerate sin, and yet looks at this church with His penetrating eyes and His omniscience indicated when he says, "I know your deeds," and as holy as He is, and as omniscient

as He is, He gives no rebuke, He gives no threat, no warning, no judgment, no condemnation on this church. This speaks well of them. If the holy One commends this church, indeed they are to be commended.

Secondly in verse 7 He introduces Himself as He who is holy and then says, "Who is true." He who is holy who is true. You find that combination in chapter 6 verse 10, "How long, O Lord, holy and true?" Holy and true. The combination of those two attributes is repeated many places in Scripture to identify God. God is often described in the magnificent attributes of absolute holiness and absolute truth. In fact we find that description all through the book of Revelation. You can see it in chapter 15 verse 3, "Great and marvelous are Thy works, O Lord God, the Almighty righteous and true are Thy ways." You see it in chapter 16 verse 7, you see it in chapter 19 verse 2, verse 11.

What is the point? Here is the Lord Jesus Christ who is holy and even though He's absolutely holy and cannot tolerate sin, looking at this church there's nothing to rebuke which tells you what a wonderful church this was. Not that they were perfect, but that they were faithful and they were dealing with their sin. Not only that, He is true, He is true in Himself. He is the author of truth. He is the revealer of truth. And He looks at this church and He has the highest premium in the universe on truth and He has nothing to condemn them about. Here is a holy church. Here is a church committed to the truth. In fact, in John 14:6 John calls Jesus by His own words, "The way, the truth and the life." In the midst of so much that is false, in the midst of so much that is perverted, in the midst of so much error, the Lord Jesus is truth.

And there's something even more there. The word that is used, alethinos, can also have the idea of genuine, authentic as opposed to that which is fake or unreal. So you have the true One, the genuine One, the real One, the true Messiah, the true Son of God, the genuine God, the One who is truth in all He says, truth in all He does. The One who has placed the ultimate premium on truth, the One who says, "I have exalted My Word above My name," Psalm 138:2. And this One looks at the church and finds them only to be commended. What an encouragement. The reason, I think, that Jesus selected these descriptive terms for John to write is because this would be an immense encouragement to this church. The earlier church in Smyrna, they were encouraged to find out that the first and the last, who was dead and has come to life says this. In other words, they were going through some terrible persecution and Christ encourages them by introducing Himself as the One who gives resurrection life. Here He encourages the Philadelphia folks by saying, "I am absolutely holy and I put a premium on truth, and My holiness and My truth have scrutinized you and there is nothing to condemn." And that poses the reality for me and for all of us that it is possible for a church, a human church, a church with people like us to be looked at by the Holy One and the true One and to be commended.

And while we want to admit that we are human and that we fail, and we struggle and we sin, we must see in this the graciousness of our God and of our Lord, to see in us something to be commended.

There's a third descriptive phrase used of Christ. "He who is holy, who is true...I love this...who has the key of David." Who has the key of David. Now David symbolizes the messianic office. In chapter 5 verse 5 and over in chapter 22 verse 16 of Revelation we read about the root of David. This is the key of David. But it also has messianic significance.

A key is a very simple symbol in the Scripture. Whenever you see a key, you can equate it with authority. And if the word "authority" gives you problems, try the word "control." Whoever has the key has control. Whoever has the key has authority.

And here Jesus says I'm the one who has the key of David. I'm the one who can open the treasure house and pour out on you royal riches. You see how congratulatory the whole spirit of this is? I think again sometimes we assume that the Lord is never happy with any of His churches. Not so. There's no such thing as a perfect church because there's no such thing as a perfect person. And if there's not even one perfect person, then every church is an assembly of a whole lot of imperfect people.

So the problem is significantly compounded. But it is possible, it is within the realm of reason and biblical revelation to assume that the Lord can look at a church and feel like it is worth celebrating. How encouraging.

He introduces Himself as the one who can unlock the treasure house and by His sovereign authority and His sovereign power open up its riches to those He chooses. He has the key to all the riches. And He will dispense them at His own discretion.

There's a note of sovereignty in this, by the way. There goes along with that authority a certain amount of sovereignty. He can determine who gets into the treasure house to experience the blessings.

This phrase also seems to put another feature before us and that is this, that the Lord Jesus also has complete control of the entrance to David's house. And this, I think, may be a secondary implication here, but I wouldn't be faithful to my own understanding of Scripture if I didn't give it as much latitude as I can. I think if we take it back to Isaiah 22:22 it has to do with opening the treasure house which means pouring out blessing and pouring out blessing to those who are deserving.

But I see also in this the possible implication that this key unlocks David's house. What is that? The kingdom. That Jesus Christ not only is able to bless His own who are faithful, but He alone can open the door to let anybody into the Kingdom. No one comes unto the Father, He said...what?...but by Me. If you're going to come, you've got to come by Me. Jesus said it another way, you remember in John's gospel He said, "I am the way," John 14. In John 10 He said, "I am the door." Here He says I

have the key, I have the sovereign authority to let you in the Kingdom. And there He's talking about salvation, coming into the Kingdom of Heaven. He's also talking perhaps eschatologically about letting you in the great future messianic kingdom. In both cases He has the key.

Obviously there was some hostile Jews attacking this church, verse 9 calls them a synagogue of Satan. And they would have denied that Jesus had the key of David. They would have denied that He could open the treasure house of God's blessing. They would have denied that He only could give entrance to the Kingdom. But they were wrong. Jesus, it says in chapter 1 verse 18, had the keys to hell and death. And here He has the keys to salvation and blessing. He could send people to hell. Or He could open the door and send them to heaven. He can shut the treasure house or He can open it.

Believe me, He came with the purpose of opening the door and letting people in the Kingdom, opening the treasure house and pouring out riches. That's why He said, "I am come that you might have life," that's salvation, "and have it more abundantly," that's the treasure house. I want to let you in, that's life. I want to pour out the treasure on you, that's abundant life. So, the Lord Jesus, the holy One, the true One, God a very God is the source of salvation and the source of

blessing.

And then a fourth element is given, and this one, too, is very rich. Again it describes the author back in verse 7 as the One who opens and no one will shut and who shuts and no one opens. I just love that. What that simply means is that whatever He does, that's it. If He opens the door to the Kingdom to somebody, nobody can shut it. If He shuts it, nobody can open it. If He opens the door of blessing and pours it out, no one can shut it. If He decides to leave it shut, no one can open it. Only He has the power. And here you see His omnipotence, His power. Without Christ, no salvation. With Christ, no one can stand against His saving purpose. Without Christ, no blessing. In Him we are blessed with all spiritual blessings in the heavenlies and no one can gainsay it, no one can stand against Him.

There's another component here that I feel I need to share with you. I believe there may be an implication here, and again I can't be dogmatic because it's hard to know every detail since it doesn't explain it all. But it also could say here that He opens and no one shuts and shuts and no one opens in terms of doors of opportunity, for service, for evangelism. In fact, in verse 8 He even makes that application and that's why I think you've got to see it in verse 7, He says, "I've put before you an open door which no one can shut." In other words, I've given you an opportunity. You say, "Well maybe He means the open door of salvation and that's what He's talking about. Or maybe He means the open door of blessing and rich treasure." That may be. But it's very possible also that He means the open door of spiritual opportunity for service and evangelism because in verse 9 He describes a marvelous evangelistic enterprise that's going to take place.

But in any case, whether it is His saving work, whether it is His blessing work, or whether it is His opening and closing doors of opportunity of service and evangelism, the point of this statement is that He opens and nobody else can shut it. He shuts it and nobody else can open it. He is sovereign, El Shaddai, the Almighty God. And as we noted in our previous studies, He is the one who is absolutely sovereign. We saw it in chapter 1 in His moving through the church, sovereignly controlling the church.

If you go back to the Old Testament you will read throughout the Old Testament of the sovereignty of God. You hear those very familiar and majestic words of Isaiah the prophet in chapter 46 as he speaks about God's almighty and sovereign power. Remember the former things long past, I am God and there is no other. I am God there is none like Me declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things which have not been done, saying My purpose will be established and I will accomplish all My good pleasure. In other words, God is saying...Look, I'll do exactly what I want and no one can stand against Me.

So the correspondent or the author is the Lord Jesus Christ. He identifies Himself as God, holy God, true God, sovereign God, powerful God. What a commendation. God who is all of these. That God sees them, knows them and looking at them closely through His holy eyes, through the eyes of His truth, through His sovereignty, through His power, He finds nothing to rebuke and nothing to correct and nothing to condemn and nothing to chasten and nothing to warn them about. What an unbelievable encouragement this is to faithfulness. What a happy day it must have been in the little church, and it was a little one, we'll note that in a moment, in the little church in Philadelphia when the guy got up and read that. You can imagine that as he read the first few words...He who is holy, and true and has the key of David and opens and no one will shut, who shuts and no one opens, says this...that they were beginning to cringe, figuring holy, true, sovereign, powerful God is going to nail us for something. And they flow through waiting for the one paragraph that never comes.

God looked and they were not perfect. But God looked and they were not wanting. The key had opened salvation. The key opened blessing. The key opened opportunities for service and evangelism. And they were faithful.

So we meet the correspondent. And His identification is encouraging. It encourages my heart. Secondly, let's look at the city. What do we know about this city of Philadelphia, not to be confused with one in our own country? Philadelphia was located about thirty miles southeast of Sardis, the church described in the prior letter. It was founded about 189, 190 B.C. by a man named Attalus who was king of Pergamos and he came over and founded this city. He had a very unusual love for his brother. Because of the unusual love that he had for his brother, he was nicknamed Philadelphia. And since he was the founder of the city his nickname stuck.

This land was rich in agriculture, had noticeable elements of volcanic ash because it was on a very, very active volcanic line. The city actually stood on a hill, on the slope of a hill looking over a long valley. It, like our own area, had experienced numerous earthquakes. The people who lived there were devastated on many occasions by massive earthquakes that literally destroyed their city and it was rebuilt on a number of occasions. They were used to aftershocks, they were used to not knowing what to expect in the movement of the earth.

The city moving fairly well east from the hub of Greco-Roman culture and pushing its way into the Orient, really, was kind of an outpost for Greek missionary activity...and I don't mean the spiritual kind, I mean selling the Greek culture to the Orient. It was kind of the Far East Outpost. And what they wanted to do was spread the Greek language. And they did. By 19 A.D. the native language, Lydian, was gone and the people spoke Greek. They pushed Greek culture to the Orient.

The city was located on a trade route, not only a trade route running to the east but what was called the Imperial Post Road where the mail went, where all the messages went. It was an Imperial Post Road stop throughout the first century, even now when this letter is being written. At one time during the Byzantine era historians tell us it was the single greatest trade route in Asia Minor.

Just to give you a pinpoint of history. In A.D. 17 a powerful earthquake destroyed twelve cities in the area, including both Sardis and Philadelphia. So it would have to been rebuilt by the time John is writing in about 96 A.D. The people lived in a fear of earthquakes.

Around A.D. 60 Laodicea was totally destroyed by an earthquake. Emperor Tiberius had helped to rebuild Philadelphia and so they erected a monument to him. We might say the place shook a lot but the church stood firm.

And that leads me to the third point, the church. What about the church? What do we know about the church? Basically nothing except what's in this letter. There's no mention of it anywhere in Scripture. People always want to know how it was founded. There is no answer to that. Probably back to Acts 19:10 again, the tremendous effective ministry in Ephesus and the Word of the Lord spread throughout all Asia Minor. Somehow when Ephesus was being planted and strengthened in the three years of the ministry of Paul, some people left there and went to this city of Philadelphia, planted a church, and that's all we know. The character of the church, we're going to see.

The fourth point that we've been dealing with in our little outline about these letters is the condemnation...and there isn't any. Like the church in Smyrna, nothing. So there's nothing to discuss except to say it doesn't mean the church was perfect. It just means there was no glaring flaw.

So we turn them to the fifth point, happily after all that we've been through with the condemnations in the last few letters, to the commendation. This is absolutely thrilling material. There are some gems of truth in this assessment of their commendation by the Lord in verses 8 to 10.

He starts out with those familiar words, "I know your deeds," and it's almost a reminder of the fact that...Look, I know the real story, folks, I don't read your press releases. I know what you're really like.

Omniscience again. The holy, true, sovereign, almighty, omniscient Lord knows everything there is to know. It's a penetrating look. And with all of that He only commends them. And He commends them for several things and I'm going to give them to you because I think they're still the things for which the Lord commends a church.

I would like to believe that our church is like Philadelphia. Not like Smyrna so much because we're not a persecuted church like the churches in eastern Europe or other parts of the world but we're probably more like the church at Philadelphia. I would like to believe we are. I wish the Lord would write us a letter. I'd like to read it. I don't know what He'd say but I hope it would be something like this one.

He says there are several things that characterize you. First, power...power. I know your deeds, He says, I know you, I know how you work, I know all about you. And then you'll notice further down in the verse He says, "You have a little power." You have a little power, a little dunamis, a little dynamite, you're a dynamite church.

Now you say, "Well now wait a minute. It sounds to me like He's saying you're pretty feeble." No, it is best to understand this because it is a commendation as simply saying...You're not very big, you're not very large, but you've got power. You're small but mighty. This is a small church, no doubt just a few. But they had had some influence in the city. This isn't a sin issue. He's not saying you have a little power and you ought to have a lot of power. He's saying you've got power for your smallness, you have spiritual power, you're just not very large. You..all alone you're not going to change the world, but you've got a little power for a small group.

It's not unreasonable to assume that they were much like Jesus' description of His disciples in Luke 12:32 when He said to them, "You're a little flock, you're so small." This little group had some power. They may have been few in number, most likely were. Probably poor. Probably low class. Probably general run of the mill undistinguished citizenry. But isn't that the stuff power comes from? Doesn't that remind you, it certainly does me, of 2 Corinthians, that great principle that the Apostle Paul identifies in 2 Corinthians chapter 12 and verse 9 as he gives his own testimony of the some of the struggles in his own life and he sums it up by making this great statement..."Therefore I am well

content with weakness, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties for Christ's sake, for when I am weak then I am strong." And he says back in verse 9, "I boast about my weakness that the power of Christ may dwell in me." Sometimes in the weakest vessel comes the delivering of the greatest power...like a grain of mustard seed, maybe. Spiritual power was flowing in that church.

What does that mean? It means lives are being transformed. That's what it means. People were being changed, powerful spiritual movement. You have power. That's what I would wish for our church, wouldn't you? To have power, to see the transforming power. We see that, don't we, in our baptismal service, that's power. People come in this church and they sit in a chair, that's a very physical thing to do, and they hear we talk, that's a very physical thing to hear, and they just sit there, it's a very physical thing...there's a guy there who is just a human being and he's talking and he's saying just these words and I'm sitting in this wooden thing with cloth on it and this is just a brick place and it's all very physical, but amazingly the power of God flows and lives are changed. This church had power.

Secondly, it was characterized by obedience. It says at the end of verse 8, you have a little power, you're small but mighty, and you have kept My Word...you kept My Word. They were bound to the Scripture. They did not deviate from a pattern of obedience. I gave you My Word and you kept it, that's just another English word for the Greek word that means to obey...you obeyed it, you did what it told you to do. It reminds us, doesn't it, of John chapter 14 where Jesus defines the nature of discipleship in these words, John 14:23, "If anyone loves Me he'll keep My Word and My Father will love him and will come to him and make our abode with him." This was a saved church. These people obeyed the Lord. That's the characteristic of a believer. He who doesn't love Me doesn't keep My words, verse 23 and 24 sum it up. You keep His words, you belong to Him. You don't keep His words, you don't love Him.

In John chapter 15 the same thing is repeated again, verse 13, "Greater love has no one than this that one lay down his life for his friends, now you are My friends if you do what I command you, if you obey My words you're My friends, you're My children, you belong to Me. These people were obedient. They were bound to the Word. The Word was preached and they applied it.

That's always been a thrilling thing about our church. I remember a number of years ago when I was preaching a series on the family out of Ephesians in the early eighties. And some of you will remember that it stirred up a huge controversy in the city of Los Angeles. And you will remember that we were picketed by some women who were calling me a chauvinist and they were parading in the patio with signs and you remember that the networks were here, ABC, NBC, CBS, and they were going around with microphones interviewing women. And then they would play it on the news. And one night I was on the news, the NBC news when Jess Marlow was the anchor on NBC and they interviewed me quite at length about what in the world kind of church is this, what are you people

saying about women being submissive to their husbands, and women being keepers at home and raising babies and that women find their fulfillment in the bearing of godly children? Where are you coming from? This is absolutely bizarre kind of alien information. And they were really on our case.

And it hit the front page of the Times Newspaper that I was a chauvinist. And I didn't know it was even coming till I picked up the paper and saw it there. And you remember so many people came in the next few weeks, we had to take the choir out of the choir loft and seat people up there and they were all over the place to hear this raving maniac. And so they were interviewing these people and I was eavesdropping on one interview and it was so wonderful because they were interviewing this lady and they were saying..."Well why do you come to this church? Why do you sit there and listen to this? Certainly you don't accept this, do you? Certainly you're a liberated woman, you're not going to stand for this."

And her answer was very simple, "Oh," she said, "it's very easy for us to accept this because, you see, we already accept the fact that the Bible is the Word of God so whatever it says we obey." And, you know, the reporter was just absolutely non-plussed and turned to me and put the microphone under my mouth and asked me a question. The next time when I was on Jess Marlow he sat me down and the first thing he said to me was this, this is how he started the conversation, "We have noted that the women in your church seem intelligent." That's what he said. How in the world can you get them to buy this stuff? That was his opening shot. His closing one was even more strange, he asked me what I thought of the uniforms on the Ram cheerleaders. Now where that came from, I'll never know.

But the whole...the whole idea, the whole idea of having a congregation of people who just do what the Bible says is what pleases the Lord of the church. This is an obedient church, you keep My word, what it says you do.

There's a third element, not only did they have power and obedience, but they had loyalty. He says you haven't denied My name. Now I suppose they were under some kind of pressure. I wouldn't doubt that there was some heavy persecution from the synagogue of Satan in verse 9 as designated, that would be a local Jewish synagogue and they would be hammering like crazy on these people in this little church, trying to get them to deny in fact that Jesus was the Messiah. I don't know who all the detractors were or the persecutors or the intimidaters, or how even fierce the persecution might have been, but through it all He says, "You have not denied My name." You stuck up for Me. His name, as I have noted on many occasions, means all that He is. You stood by Me. You were faithful. You were loyal. I love the attribute of loyalty. It didn't matter what it cost them.

Revelation 14:12 says, "Here is the perseverance of the saints who keep the commandments of God and their faith in Jesus." They persevere. They hang in there. They don't deny His name, the mighty, powerful name of Jesus Christ, the name which is above every name, the name that causes

ultimately every knee to bow. They do not deny. It doesn't matter what you do to them, they won't deny it. They won't recant their faith. They were loyal.

And then the fourth component, endurance. This church had power, obedience, loyalty and endurance. Verse 10, "Because you have kept the word of My perseverance." I like the way the NIV translates that, it's clearer. "You have kept My command to endure patiently."

It wasn't always easy. Sometimes it was hard. Lots of things come in and out of the life of a church. Some people patiently, faithfully, perseveringly endure through it all. Some don't. This church did. You were there in the good times and you were there in the hard times. You were there when everything was going up and you were there when everything was going down. That is a very, very wonderful characteristic of spiritual strength, it endures. It takes the bad times, it takes the trials, it takes the difficulties and stays faithful.

This is the kind of endurance that our Lord Himself displayed. In fact, you could even translate this with that kind of emphasis. You have kept the word of My perseverance in the sense that you have done it the way that I did it. If anyone ever persevered, it was Jesus, right? He endured faithfully, patiently until they killed Him. The patience of Christ, the endurance of Christ is certainly our model of ultimate endurance. In 2 Thessalonians 3:5 Paul prays, "May the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God and into the endurance, or the steadfastness of Christ." So He is saying you have kept My command to endure patiently...there's another nuance, too, you could throw in there, you have kept My command and My example of enduring patiently. Either is possible in the Greek and so maybe the Holy Spirit wants us to take both.

The Lord requires this. We read about it so many times in the gospels, how He asked for His followers to endure. I think of Matthew 10:22, "You will be hated by all on account of My name, but it is the one who has endured to the end that will be saved." This is a faithful church, this is an enduring church, through trials, persecution, faithful Christians took it all patiently in hope of God's care and God's deliverance.

So here's a little church, not big, not famous in the world, but there was really nothing wrong, nothing scandalous, nothing devastating. They had power, they had obedience, they had loyalty, they had endurance. And because of this the Lord gives them some absolutely astounding promises.

Look at verse 8, "Behold, I've put before you an open door which no one can shut." Because you have a little power, kept My word and not denied My name, because of these qualities, first promise, I have put before you an open door which no one can shut. And that ties right in to how He introduces Himself in the prior verse.

Well what does that mean? Let's go back and say what we said before. Kingdom admission, you have a place in My Kingdom. This is evidence of your genuine salvation. I see your power. I see your obedience. I see your loyalty. I see your endurance. And I say to you the Kingdom is open to you and nobody can close it. I welcome you to My Kingdom, I welcome you to the sphere of salvation by grace through faith and some day I'll welcome you into My earthly messianic Kingdom. The Jews may try to shut it. They may try to keep Christians out. They may try to keep Gentiles out. They can't. What's the promise? Eternal salvation, eternal security.

Then there's another element also. Remember I told you that the idea of the key that opens can be the treasure house? And perhaps He is saying here there is an open door not only into the Kingdom but an open door into the treasure house where you can collect all the blessings that are yours in Christ, Ephesians 1:3.

But there's that third element. And I think maybe that's what He has in mind here when He says, "I have put before you an open door which no one can shut," and He's saying I'm giving you service opportunity, I'm giving you evangelistic opportunity. You're going to be an instrument for salvation.

I'll tell you, folks, that to me is the greatest thrill. Do you know I talk to pastors who go through a year in a church and never see someone come to Christ? There are some churches that probably haven't seen somebody come to Christ in years because God isn't opening any door for them. But where you have a church that is powerful and obedient and loyal, enduring, the Lord says the first thing I'm going to do for you is open up the door of opportunity.

An open door, by the way, was an image that Paul used a lot. And he used it when he wanted to talk about freedom for proclaiming the gospel. In 1 Corinthians chapter 16 and verse 9 he says, "A wide door for effective service has opened to me and there are many adversaries." That's the door of service. In 2 Corinthians 2:12 he says, "When I came to Troas for the gospel of Christ and when a door was opened to me..." And it was a door for service, ministry, evangelization. In Colossians chapter 4 he says in verse 2, "Devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert in it with an attitude of thanksgiving, praying at the same time for us as well that God may open to us a door for the Word."

So, the key opens a lot of things. It opens the Kingdom. It opens the treasure house. It opens opportunity for ministry. And the Lord says to this church, you're powerful, you're obedient, you're loyal, you're enduring, I'm going to open the door of opportunity and I'm going to use you as an instrument of salvation. I'm going to use you as My ministers. And that little city on the trade route, on the Imperial Post Road was in a vital location for spreading the gospel. It had done very well in spreading the gospel of Greek culture, now it could spread the saving gospel of Christ.

And then there's another promise that has to be related to that point regarding opportunity for evangelism, look at verse 9. You've got to love this. "Behold," and he uses that word three times in

this letter like...Wow, can you believe this? "I will cause those of the synagogue of Satan who say they are Jews and are not but lie, behold, I'll make them come and bow down at your feet and know that I have loved you." Whew...what He says is the very Jews that are persecuting you are going to get saved.

There was a local Jewish synagogue there. In the Old Testament, Psalm 74:8, they called the synagogue the synagogue of God. I'm sure they still called it the synagogue of God, only Jesus says it's the synagogue of Satan. They don't worship God there, they worship Satan. They don't know it, but they do.

Go back to chapter 2 verse 9. It was the same kind of thing that the church in Smyrna had. There's another mention there of people who say they're Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. Listen, I'm telling you, the Jews can persecute the church mercilessly. They've done it all through the years of the church's life and even still it is done. But I'm going to take those people in that synagogue, those Jews, He says who say they are Jews and are not but lie. What in the world does He mean by that? Well they claim to be true Jews, sons of Abraham, sons of God. They lie. Genetically they're Jewish, legally Jewish, ceremonially Jewish, spiritually they're not. And he is a Jew who is one inwardly, the Scripture says. And circumcision is that which is of the heart, Romans 2:28 and 29.

So the church was being hit by the hostility of this group of Jews who hated the fact that they were saying that Jesus is the Messiah, Jesus is God, because the Jews had cried for His blood to be shed, they wanted Him dead. And so He says...Behold, I'm going to take that synagogue of Satan, those who say they're Jews and they aren't but lie, behold...He says it again...wow, He throws this interjection in again...I'll make them come and bow down at your feet and to know that I have loved you.

Bowing down at someone's feet was the ancient posture of a humbled, defeated enemy. I'm going to bring these enemies in and they're going to bow down at your feet. That imagery is so vivid...the vanquished foe, the humbled antagonist, the defeated enemy.

Perspective on that comes if you look into Isaiah. Let me just share this and we'll draw this to a conclusion. Isaiah 45:14 says, "Thus says the Lord, the products of Egypt and the merchandise of Cush and the Sabians, men of stature, will come over to you and be yours," he says to the Jews. All these non-Jewish people are going to come and belong to you. "They'll walk behind you, they'll come over in chains, they'll bow down to you, they'll make supplication to you, surely God is with you and there is none else, no other God."

He says all these nations are going to bow down to you. Now that's the things the Jews thought. They believed that all the whole world eventually would bow down to them. These nations are going

to bow down to you...said Isaiah. Over in chapter 49 verse 23, "Thus says the Lord God, I'll lift up My hand to the nations, I'll set up My standard to the peoples, they will bring your sons in their bosom and your daughters will be carried on their shoulders. Kings will be your guardians, princes your nurses and I'll make them bow down to you with their faces to the earth and lick the dust of your feet and you'll know I am the Lord."

In other words, the whole world of kings and nations are going to bow down and lick the dust on the Jews' feet. Chapter 60 of Isaiah in verse 14, the same thing, "The sons of those who afflicted you will come bowing to you, and all those who despise you will bow themselves at the souls of your feet and they will call you the city of the Lord."

What is Isaiah saying? The day is going to come when the whole world bows down to the Jews. But do you know what the letter from Jesus is saying here? It is saying that day hasn't come yet, for now the Jews are going to bow down at your feet. That would be more than those Jews could bear to hear. It's reversed here. So He says they're going to come, they're going to bow down at your feet and they're going to know that I, God, have loved you. You're the objects of my love.

What's He saying here? Jews are going to get saved in your little church. Some of those people in the synagogue of Satan are going to get converted. That's historically what it meant.

What does it mean to a faithful church? I believe this, listen carefully, I believe that a faithful church throughout the history of the church, faithful churches, have an impact on Jews. You know, I thank God this church probably through the years has had more Jewish Christians than any church I know of across the country. I thank God for that, I rejoice in that. And I think that's because God has blessed our church with this same kind of promise.

But there's even an eschatological perspective here. There is a day coming in the future when the whole nation Israel is going to bow before Christ, right? Romans 11, "So all Israel will be saved." Zechariah 12, "They'll look on Him whom they've pierced and mourn for Him as an only Son and a fountain of blessing will be open to Israel and their sins will be washed away." Historically, this little church saw the synagogue that persecuted Him get converted. Through the history of the church, think about it, Jewish people have been converted, they've come and bowed the knee before the church and said, "Yes, God has loved you." And I want to be in on that love. Just in modern times, in England a converted Jew named Joseph Frye had a dream of being called to reach London Jews. He labored under the London Missionary Society as a missionary to Jews for five years and founded the London society for promoting Christian knowledge among Jews. In 1842 society for the propagation of the gospel among Jews began. In 1876 the Mildmay(?) Mission to Jews, the Kilburn Mission to the Jews in 1896. By the end of the nineteenth century there was one Christian missionary for every one thousand Jews in the British Isles. And God began to give the church Jews who came down and bowed the knee and said yes, God has set His love on you, I want to be a part

of that.

I think about Europe, even in the Protestant movement in 1800 in the Netherlands, the London Jewish Society had a tremendous evangelistic outreach. In 1849 Carl Swartz established a mission college to train people to reach Jews. In 1844 the Netherlands Society for Promoting Christianity Among Jews was founded. The first mission to Jews was in Norway was in 1844, in Sweden, 1856, in Denmark, 1885, in Switzerland, 1825, in Germany, 1820 and it's gone that way through Europe to Russia, Poland, Latvia, Estonia. Alexander I was interested in converting Jews and got a converted Russian Jew by the name of Moritz to be an evangelist to his people. In Italy and Spain and Portugal and France and Belgium and Czechoslovakia between 1850 and 1900, tremendous outreach to Jews and many were converted to Christ. In Palestine in 1821 was founded the American Board of Commissioners and the London Jews Society. Jews have been coming to Christ all these years.

In 1902 40,000 Jews in Palestine were under the direct influence of the gospel. In Asia the gospel has gone to Jews in Turkey, Syria, Yemen, Iraq, Iran, India, Persia. Over in Africa the London Jewish Society went into Egypt, Tunisia, Algeria, on and on it goes.

And we all know about America. And I'll tell you, those churches that are faithful like the church at Philadelphia are the ones the Lord gives an open door to and causes Jewish people to be attracted and bow the knee and say I want the love that God has given you.

So He promises the faithful church, first of all, the door's open to salvation and the Kingdom, the door's open to blessing and the door's open to opportunity for service and evangelism. And the second thing I'm promising you is that your persecutors among the Jews are going to bow the knee to Jesus Christ.

There's another promise, absolutely overwhelming, come back next week, I'll tell you what it is. Let's pray.

Father, we rejoice in our wonderful fellowship tonight as we have gotten a glimpse of this wonderful church. We want to be like this church, not for our own sake but for Your sake. Bless these truths to our hearts, in Jesus' name. Amen.

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