

Session 6

July 11, 2021

FAITHFUL IN ALL THINGS

Revelation 3:7-13

About thirty miles southeast of Sardis, was Philadelphia. Philadelphia was the newest of the seven churches, founded around 189 BC. At 800 feet up the valley's hillside, the city was not meant to be a military fortress, but rather a center for Greek art and culture. Like its sister city Sardis, Philadelphia was rocked by a sizeable earthquake in 17 AD and was rebuilt by Rome. It too, had a monument dedicated to the Roman emperor who rebuilt the city. The remarks aimed at the church there are commendable, but with the subtle warning to "hold on to what you have."

The Christ (v. 7). The description of Christ as the speaker is dramatic. His *attributes* are listed first: He is *Holy*. The central idea of holiness is separateness. Christ is the one and only and there is none like Him. And He is *True*. That means that He is the essence of truth. Next, His *authority* is described. He has the "key of David" (see Is. 22:22). Keys always represent *access*. As King David ruled, he had the absolute authority to allow people into his kingdom or to shut them out. So it is with Christ and the Kingdom of God. For reflection: *How did Christ provide access to His kingdom for sinners like us? How does this principle relate to what Jesus told Peter in Matt. 16:18-20?*

The church (vv. 8). Unlike some of the other seven churches, we know very little about this one. It was likely started by Paul during his three years at Ephesus. But the description given here is quite laudable. Three characteristics are mentioned. First, they were *strong* for their size. This is the general idea of "limited strength" (literally, "a little power") in verse 8. Second, the church *kept His word*. This phrase not only refers to obeying it, but also means they *set a guard* over it. Clearly the church valued the word of God. Third, the congregation *never denied His name*. This may have been a general statement meaning the church stayed true to the faith. But it is just as likely to apply to those saints who, under direct persecution, refused to renounce Christ even under the threat of torture or even death. For reflection: *The Bible teaches that difficult times will increase for God's people as His coming approaches. Do you see evidence of the world's attacks increasing? Do you believe your church is prepared to face such attacks? How could we better prepare our people?*

The consequences (vv. 8-10). Because of their faithfulness, the church was rewarded with opportunity, honor, and security. In terms of *opportunity*, there was afforded to them an open-door for service. When the apostle Paul spoke of an open door, it especially involved opportunities to share the gospel of Christ (see 1 Cor. 16:8-9; 2 Cor. 2:12; Col. 4:2-3). In terms of *honor*, they would actually be exalted by their persecutors. Like the church in Smyrna, the church at Philadelphia was under attack by unbelieving Jews who had forsaken their own faith, much less Christianity. The picture here is not one of worship, but respect. To fall at one's feet is to be in total submission, indicating total defeat. In terms of *security*, the church would be *kept from the hour of testing* (v. 10). While this can be protection from tribulation in general, it can also refer specifically to the Great Tribulation (see Dan. 9 and Matt. 24), those seven years of wrath from which Christ's church will be either supernaturally protected (as some believe) or removed entirely through the Rapture (see 1 Thess. 4:13-18). For reflection: *Do you believe the*

church will go through the Great Tribulation or be taken away before? What is your pastor's view? What Scriptures can be used to support both sides of this debate?