

The Church That Honors Jesus (Revelation 3:7-13)

Introduction

- 1) My father in the ministry is Dr. Paige Patterson. He has served as the president of the **Southern Baptist Convention** (1998-2000) and is currently president of one of the world's largest and finest seminaries: **Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary** in Wake Forest, N.C. He was my ethics and preaching professor. He preached my ordination. He hired me onto the faculty of 2 different institutions and I served alongside of him for 9 years. Charlotte and I had the honor of being in his daughter, Carmen's, wedding. He is truly one of my mentors and one of my heroes.

Over our many years together Dr. Patterson taught me many valuable and important lessons. Yet the most valuable and most important was perhaps the simplest and most basic. We were having lunch one day and while we were talking he looked at me and said, "Danny, just remember this. **"All that matters in life is that you please God. Period.** Just do that and everything will work out just fine." The simplicity of that statement is astounding. The truth of that statement requires no discussion or debate. All that really matters in life is that we please God.

- 2) There was a church in the 1st century that learned this lesson very well. They might anger the devil and agitate the world, but they made it their consuming passion to please God. The church is the church at Philadelphia, and what an outstanding model for ministry she provides for us who want our church to please and honor Jesus.

I. Christ is characterized by His awesomeness. 3:7

This church was located at a strategic cross-section of trade routes in the Hermus River Valley about 28 miles SE of Sardis and 100 miles due west of Smyrna. A main highway connected Smyrna and Philadelphia and the imperial post road ran through the city as well. Rightly was it called "the gateway to the East." The city's name, meaning "brotherly love," honors and remembers the loyalty and love of Attalus II to his brother Eumenes II. When a false rumor got out that Eumenes had been assassinated, Attalus took his crown. When his brother returned alive from Greece, Attalus relinquished the crown without debate. Later Rome encouraged Attalus to overthrow his brother, but he again remained faithful to Eumenes.

Philadelphia was destroyed by earthquake in AD 17 but rebuilt with the help of Tiberius Caesar. Its loyalty to Rome was strong. A prosperous and strong fortress city, the city was meant to be a "*missionary city*" for the spread of Greek culture to the east. In this it was somewhat successful.

A thriving grape industry naturally led to the worship of Dionysus, the god of wine. By the 5th century AD Philadelphia would be called "*Little Athens*" because of its many temples and religious celebrations. Prosperous and pagan to the core, the church in its city had only "a little strength" (v. 8).

Transition

To stay faithful in her assignment she needed to see that our God is an awesome God and that He reigns from heaven above. They knew He was Savior, but they needed to see that He was sovereign.

1. Our Lord is a God of purity.

Angel – (*aggelo*) – messenger, representative, pastor

Church – (*ekklesia*) – assembly, congregation

Write – (imp.) – Word of command conveying both a sense of authority and a sense of urgency.

He who is holy (lit. “the holy one,” Gr. *hagios*) – the pure, separated and utterly distinct one. He is separated from creation because He is the Creator. He is separated from sin because He is the Savior. In Acts 3:14 He is called the Holy One and the Just.” **Holy One** is a familiar and foundational title for God in the Old Testament (Isa. 40:25; Hab. 3:3) and demons apply it to Jesus in Mark 1:24. Jesus is pure and undefiled, majestically spotless and without stain or blemish.

*What can only be said of God in the absolute sense can also be said of Jesus.

2. Our Lord is a God of reliability.

He who is true (*alethinos*) – real, genuine, the opposite of that which is false. Jesus is trustworthy. He cannot lie or lead anyone astray. He is the true Messiah and the faithful master who can be counted on at every point and in any situation.

John 14:6 – “the way, the truth and the life...”

1 John 5:20 – “the true God and eternal life.”

*All other gods are idols and mere shams. Jesus is the real deal, the genuine article, the true God. You can trust Him in what He says and in what He does each and every time, now and forever.

3. Our Lord is a God of authority.

He who has the key of David – implicitly this phrase looks to 1:18 (keys of Hades and Death), but explicitly it looks back to the Old Testament and Isaiah 22:22. There King Hezekiah appoints Eliakim as “prime minister” and chief steward of his kingdom. Having the key speaks of his authority and control to admit or exclude who will come into the presence of the King. Jesus is the Davidic Messiah, the Savior of the world. He and He alone possesses absolute authority and control as to who will enter God’s kingdom and have access to him. He alone has the key.

1 Timothy 2:5, “There is one mediator ...”

John 10:9, “I am the door. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture.”

*Only one holds the key to eternal life and His name is Jesus.

4. **Our Lord is a God of sovereignty.**

He who opens and no one shuts, and shuts and no one opens. The door to salvation swings open and closes at the discretion of Jesus and Jesus alone. Mohammed has no control over this door. Buddha has no control over this door. No pope, priest, guru or self-appointed cultist determines who walks through salvation's door. This door belongs only to Jesus and He shares His authority with no one. At one time the door was slammed shut, sealed up by our sin. But by the blood of the cross and His glorious resurrection the door has been opened and anyone who will approach it with faith in Jesus will find it already opened wide to them.

“Jesus Lamb of God appointed, All our sins on you were laid;
By almighty love anointed, you a full atonement made:
All your people are forgiven, thru the virtue of Your blood;
Open is the door of heaven, peace is made for man with God.”

(rev. of *Hail, Thou Once Despised Jesus*)

Transition

Jesus is the door and Jesus has the key. Our Lord is a God of sovereignty.

II. **The Church is commended for its actions. 3:8-10**

Rick Warren, of Saddleback Community Church in California, says a healthy church will exhibit 5 basic characteristics:

- 1) It will grow warmer through fellowship.
- 2) It will grow deeper through discipleship.
- 3) It will grow stronger through worship.
- 4) It will grow broader through ministry.
- 5) It will grow larger through evangelism.

Jack Dennison of CitiReach adds,

“In the past, when we heard the word ‘church,’ we always thought first of a building, an address, and a time: ‘We meet in the XYZ Church on Smith Street at 10:00 a.m. every Sunday.’ This ‘come’ mentality must be changed, and we must return to the dynamism of the early church, which was a ‘go’ church. It didn’t bring people to church but took the church to the people.”

(quoted in *PrayerNet Newsletter*, Sep 20, 1999, page 1)

Both Rick’s and Jack’s definition point to a church on mission, a church of action. They are not passive but active. They are not stagnant but moving, and moving in the right way and for the right reasons. The church at Philadelphia was a church on the go and one that was going in the right way. Three wonderful truths are noted about her.

1. **The Church’s energy should focus on God’s direction. (3:8)**

God knew their works, their faithful and steadfast service for Jesus. Such a church is properly challenged and rewarded.

See (behold), I have set (perf. ten.) before you an open door and no one can shut it. What is the open door: 1) the open door into the eternal kingdom;

2) Christ; 3) prayer; 4) immediate access to God by martyrdom; or 5) a great opportunity for evangelism and missionary activity (cf. 1 Cor. 16:9; 2 Cor. 2:12; Col. 4:3). #5 is the best view. This church had little strength (*dunamin*) but great potential. She had constant trials but kept Christ's Word. They faced consistent opposition but did not deny Jesus' name. Though they could not open the door to evangelism and missions, they knew the one who could and He had. A church like Philadelphia could be trusted to walk through the door Christ opened. They would not delay or debate, but with determined dedication they would follow the Lord's leading. As evangelists of the Greek culture, the city of Philadelphia had only partially succeeded. As evangelists of the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, the church at Philadelphia would not stop until their assignment was completed. "We'll work 'til Jesus comes" was the song that undergirded their service.

*They were busy in only a few things.

*They were busy in the right things.

2. **The Church's enemies will fall by God's decision. (3:9)**

Indeed (behold) ... synagogue of Satan (cf. 2:8) ...

- 1) worship before your feet
- 2) know that I [myself] have loved you

Christ says I, not you, will humble your enemies. The opposition you face now is limited and will not last. There is coming a day of justice and vindication. You leave all of it in my hands.

*Some Jews will come in conversion (Rom. 11:25ff).

*Some Jews will come at judgment.

*As Phil. 2:10-11 teaches: "that at the name of Jesus EVERY KNEE SHOULD BOW, of those who are in heaven, and on earth, and under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

3. **The Church's endurance will foster God's deliverance. (3:10)**

They have kept Christ's command to persevere, endure, stay with it and maintain their devotion. In response Christ promises them a remarkable deliverance from an hour of trial which will test the whole world and those who dwell on the earth. This last phrase is significant and is repeated several times in Revelation. In every instance it refers to unbelievers exclusively as the objects of God's wrath (cf. 6:10; 8:13; 11:10; 12:12; 13:8,12,14).

Therefore several truths should be noted:

- 1) The hour of trial is focused on unbelievers.
- 2) Christ promises deliverance to his children not from trial or persecution in general, but from a specific and definite trial that is aimed at rebellious humanity.

Dr. John MacArthur summarizes well the thrust of this text when he writes,

"Because the believers in Philadelphia had successfully passed so many tests, Jesus promised to spare them from the ultimate test. The sweeping nature of that promise extends far beyond the Philadelphia congregation to encompass all faithful churches throughout history. This verse promises that the church

will be delivered from the Tribulation, thus supporting a pretribulation Rapture. The Rapture is the subject of three passages in the New Testament (John 14:1-4; 1 Cor. 15:51-54; 1 Thess. 4:13-17), none of which speak of judgment, but rather of the church being taken up to heaven. There are three views of the timing of the Rapture in relation to the Tribulation: that it comes at the end of the Tribulation (posttribulationism), in the middle of the Tribulation (midtribulationism), and the view that seems to be supported by this text, that the Rapture takes place before the tribulation (pretribulationism). Several aspects of this wonderful promise may be noted. First, the test is yet future. Second, the test is for a definite, limited time; Jesus described it as the **hour of testing**. Third, it is a test or trial that will expose people for what they really are. Fourth, the test is worldwide in scope, since it will **come upon the whole world**. Finally, and most significantly, its purpose is **to test those who dwell on the earth** – a phrase used as a technical term in the book of Revelation for unbelievers (cf. 6:10; 8:13; 11:10; 13:8, 12, 14; 14:6; 17:2,8). The **hour of testing** is Daniel’s Seventieth Week (Dan. 9:25-27), the time of Jacob’s trouble (Jer. 30:7), the seven-year tribulation period. The Lord promises to keep His church out of the future time of testing that will come on unbelievers.

(MacArthur Commentary)

Along with John MacArthur, Chuck Swindoll, David Jeremiah, Tim LaHaye, Paige Patterson, Adrian Rogers, Jerry Vines, and Billy Graham, I too am convinced the Lord will deliver the church and keep us from the Great Tribulation. In addition to the promise of this verse, I would also add the following additional evidence:

Additional Support For the Pretribulation Position

1. The church is not appointed to wrath (Rom. 8:9; 1 Thess. 1:9-10; 5:9). The context of this promise, especially in 1 Thess. 5:9, is the Great Tribulation. The church, therefore, should not expect to enter “The great day of His wrath” (Rev. 6:17) which is directed toward unbelievers.
2. The chronology of the discussion in 1 Thess. 4:13-5:11 argues for a pretribulation rapture. The rapture discussion in chapter 4 precedes the Day of the Lord discussion in chapter 5. This would indicate that the rapture takes place before the Day of the Lord.
3. In 2 Thessalonians 2, the believers were alarmed that the Day of the Lord was upon them, which does not appear to be consistent with the belief that they would not go through the Tribulation. By assuring them that they were not in the Day of the Lord, Paul encouraged them in their pretribulationism.
4. In Rev. 19:11-21, the saints are viewed as “coming with” Christ at His Second Coming, not “waiting for” Him. Furthermore, the Church is in heaven prior to the Second Coming for the Marriage Supper of the Lamb (Rev. 19:1-10). Thus they must at some time have been gathered to Him

prior to both of these events. This would be consistent with pretribulationism.

- ✿ 5. The New Testament emphasizes the imminent return of Christ. The exhortation to look for “the glorious appearing” of Christ to His own (Titus 2:13) loses its significance if the tribulation must come first. Believers in that case should look for signs. This is the strongest argument for pretribulationism.

III. **The Church is challenged in its attainments. 3:11-13**

For a faithful church there is the assurance of a future celebration. Indeed, “it will be worth it all when we see Jesus.” Four words of encouragement or challenge are placed before the church by her Lord.

1. **We are challenged to hopeful perseverance. (3:11)**

Behold, I am coming quickly (cf. 22:7, 12, 20) is not a threat of judgment but a promise of deliverance fast on the heels of v. 10. Because His coming is imminent, any day, any time, they should hold fast (pre. imp.; cf. 2:25; 3:3) what they have, His Word, His name, His promise of deliverance, that no one may take their crown. Loss of salvation is nowhere in view for that could never be taken, but Satan or evil men could rob them of future reward if they were to get their eyes off Jesus or be tempted to deny His name or disobey His Word. Stay with it Jesus says; there is a crown waiting at the finish line.

2. **We are challenged by heavenly permanence. (3:12)**

A pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go out no more. To a people continually threatened by earthquakes and the need to flee the city when they come, this word would speak powerfully to their hearts. Alan Johnson notes, “Often the only parts of a city left standing after a severe quake were the huge stone temple columns [pillars]” (p. 61).

Rev. 21:22 tells us in the New Jerusalem “the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple.” To be a pillar of Christ puts the believer in a position of absolute and complete security. No disruption, disturbance or disaster will ever separate us from our Savior. As Romans 8:38-39 beautifully testify, “For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

3. **We are challenged with honored acceptance. (3:12)**

The church at Philadelphia had a good name, a wonderful reputation in heaven. Jesus promises them, “it will only get better.” Because they had not been ashamed to identify themselves with Jesus, our Lord is not ashamed to identify Himself with them. Three times Jesus promises them a new name of blessing and honor from His God.

- 1) They receive the name of God, the God of Jesus, the one true God.
- 2) They receive the name of God’s city, the New Jerusalem (cf. 21:2; Heb. 12:22). We will discover the New Jerusalem is both a place and a people.

They will have a citizenship not on earth but in heaven, not earthly Philadelphia or Louisville but heavenly Jerusalem.

- 3) They receive the new name of Jesus (cf. 19:12; 22:4; 2:17).

*The names signify identification, character, ownership, and recognition. The names signify who my God is, where my home is and who my Lord is! I belong to the Father, heaven is my home and Jesus is my Lord. I bear the signature of my God!

“Onward to the prize before us! Soon His beauty we’ll behold; Soon the pearly gates will open; We shall tread the streets of gold. When we all get to heaven, what a day of rejoicing that will be! When we all see Jesus, we’ll sing and shout the victory ...”

4. We are challenged through heavenly correspondence. (3:13)

He has an ear – are you listening, paying attention?

Let him hear (imp) a word of command

What the Spirit says – the word is a word from God

Churches (pl.) the word was for Philadelphia then, the word is for us today!

Conclusion

There are churches that honor Jesus. There are Christians that honor Jesus. Are your ears open to what the Spirit is saying to you? Are you keeping God’s word, taking a daily stand for Jesus, enduring trials on His behalf, and obediently walking through open doors of service?

Never forget, He took a stand for you, and He walked through the door of suffering up to a hill with a cross that had your name on it.

Aristotle said, “the gods feel no love for humans.” The Spirit says, “God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son ...”