

⁷ “And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write, ‘These things says He who is holy, He who is true, ‘He who has the key of David, He who opens and no one shuts, and shuts and no one opens’: ⁸ “I know your works. See, I have set before you an open door, and no one can shut it; for you have a little strength, have kept My word, and have not denied My name. ⁹ Indeed I will make *those* of the synagogue of Satan, who say they are Jews and are not, but lie—indeed I will make them come and worship before your feet, and to know that I have loved you. ¹⁰ Because you have kept My command to persevere, I also will keep you from the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth. ¹¹ Behold, I am coming quickly! Hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown. ¹² He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he shall go out no more. 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 out of heaven from My God. And *I will write on him* My new name. ¹³ “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.””

Introduction

Philadelphia was the youngest of all the 7 cities.

The Greek word for Philadelphia is **“Philadelphos”**, the word means **“one who loves his brother”**.

The ruler of this area at the time that the city was found was a man by the name of “Attalus”, he had such a love for his brother Eumenes, that he named the city, **“One who loves his brother”**

The city was founded with one fixed purpose in mind.

The purpose of the city was to promote Greek culture and the Greek language.

Although we will come to this point later, I want to point out that the Greek language was one of the best ways to spread the Gospel at that time. Most people spoke some Greek and the first Bible to be translated was written in Greek.

When Jesus died on the cross, the statement, Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews was written in Aramaic, Latin and Greek.

(John 19:v. 20)

Once when travelling to Greece, I met a young man on the aeroplane. I explained that I was a Christian and wanted to ask him some questions about the Greek Language. He spoke fluent English.

I wanted to know about the Greek language in the time of John writing this letter and today's Greek language.

I was specifically interested in the way that each Greek word had a specific meaning and could not be used for another situation.

This is very important when interpreting the Bible in the original language.

The young university graduate assured me that the same principle applies today, although naturally some new words have been introduced to the language.

My point here is that the Greek language and the Roman Empire was used in a wonderful way for the spread of the Gospel in the first century A.D.

The open door that Jesus talks about was the open door to spread the gospel.

Philadelphia also had a feature that is highlighted in this letter.

It was on the edge of a “Great Volcanic Plain”. The land was very fertile and it was the centre of grape growing.

In A.D. 17 there was a great earthquake which destroyed Sardis, and lots of Philadelphia. The aftershocks went on for years.

A great deal of money was given by the Emperor to restore the city.

Out of respect to the Emperor the name of the city was changed to “Flavia”, this was the Emperor’s family name.

The city knew what it was to receive a new name.

Later the city reverted back to its old name.

Philadelphia was the last Christian city to be conquered, this happened in the 14th century.

There are still believers who meet in Philadelphia today, even though it is in Turkey which is a very strong Muslim country.

We now come to the letter itself.

There are number of things that we will examine in this letter.

1. Jesus and more of his attributes – v. 7.

Jesus introduces this letter by giving us 3 more titles to His name.

The first is “**He who is Holy**”.

“**Holy**” is the description of God Himself.

Isaiah Chapter 6: v. 3. 7

³ And one cried to another and said: “Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; The whole earth is full of His glory!”

⁷ And he touched my mouth *with it*, and said: “Behold, this has touched your lips; Your iniquity is taken away, And your sin purged.”

Isaiah 40 : v. 25

²⁵ “To whom then will you liken Me, Or *to whom* shall I be equal?” says the Holy One.

Isaiah 43: v.15.

¹⁵ I *am* the LORD, your Holy One, The Creator of Israel, your King.”

All through the Old Testament God is the Holy One and now that title is given to the risen Jesus Christ.

The word Holy in the Greek Language means, different and separate from.

God is Holy because He is different from men and women.

The quality of Holiness belongs to God alone.

For Jesus to say that He is “Holy” is to say that He shares this equally with God. Jesus has the same attributes as God.

This is an important part of the doctrine of Jesus Christ.

The second title Jesus gives Himself is – “**He who is true**”

In the Greek language there are two words for true. The first one “*alethes*” means true in the sense that a true statement is different from a false statement.

The second Greek word which is the one used here in the text is “*alethinous*” which means “REAL” as opposed to unreal.

In Jesus we have REALITY.

In Japan today, many people live in a fantasy world. It is not the real world.

In the U.K. before I came to Japan there was a T.V. programme which highlighted that some men have fantasy girlfriends on the internet.

I do not mean that they skype , text or e mail people.

They have a girlfriend who is a computer girlfriend.

The computer girlfriends talks to them and they share information with each other.

For the men, they really think it is all real but it is fantasy.

This may sound strange but it really happens.

Jesus is saying that I am the real deal, or the real McCoy, as Americans might say.

A relationship with Jesus is REALITY and Not FANTASY.

When we are confronted with Jesus in the Bible we are confronted with a real person, who is reality if you receive Him into your heart by FAITH.

The third title that Jesus gives Himself is **“He who has the key of David, who opens and no one shuts , who shuts and no one opens.”**

Firstly we need to note that the key is the symbol of authority.

If a door is locked, you need a key to open it.

Jesus has the final authority, and nobody can question His authority.

Behind this statement there is an Old Testament picture.

Please turn with me to Isaiah Chapter 22 V.20- 23

²⁰ ‘Then it shall be in that day, That I will call My servant Eliakim the son of Hilkiah; ²¹ I will clothe him with your robe And strengthen him with your belt; I will commit your responsibility into his hand. He shall be a father to the inhabitants of Jerusalem And to the house of Judah. ²² The key of the house of David I will lay on his shoulder; So he shall open, and no one shall shut; And he shall shut, and no one shall open. ²³ I will fasten him as a peg in a secure place, And he will become a glorious throne to his father’s house.

Hezekiah had a faithful servant called Eliakim, he was responsible for all of his house. Only Eliakim could admit people into the presence of the King.

Jesus is in some way comparing Himself to the faithful servant in the old Testament that God blessed.

However the picture in John’s mind here is that Jesus alone has the authority to admit people to the “New Jerusalem, the New city of David”

2. Jesus commends the faithful Church – v.8

Jesus commends the faithful church because, despite the fact that they have only a little strength, they have kept God’s word and have not compromised or denied His name.

Let us look briefly at these two commendations.

Before we do this I want us to note that the Church had a little strength.

It is not 100% clear what John means by the Church having little strength.

However what we can understand from the context is that although humanly speak they were not strong in numbers, their offerings may have been low, and their praise group may not have had any musical instruments, we do know that they were strong in the Lord and in the power of His might.

Paul said in 2 Corinthians 12: v. 10 “ When I am weak, then I am strong..”

Paul also says in the same chapter in v.9 “...My strength is made perfect in weakness..”

Paul also says in 1 Corinthians 1: v. 27 “ ...God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty....”

So because the little Church was weak and trusting in God’s strength, they were being blessed.

It is a healthy position for any Church to acknowledge that without God, we have no strength.

This may have been a Church with little strength but God commends them for **“Keeping His word”**.

These believers did not have a copy of the New Testament, but they did have some copies of the Old Testament books.

One thing for sure is that they would have had the writings of Moses.

The first 5 books of the Bible, the Torah were deeply imbedded into the minds and hearts of the Jewish people.

Even though they put their faith in Jesus Christ, as God’s Son, who died on the cross for their sins, they still remained Jewish in culture and in their respect for God’s word.

The Jewish people have a tremendous respect for God’s word.

They have carefully preserved God’s word over thousands of years so that today we can enjoy the riches of God’s grace.

Let us realise the importance of God’s word for us today and try to respect it, honour it and obey it.

The Church was also commended for not denying the name of Jesus.

This means that did not compromise or denied being a Christian when challenged in a situation that might cause them to be abused or even persecuted.

3. Jesus makes Promises to the faithful Church – v.8 – 10.

Jesus promises the faithful Church an “Open Door that no one can shut”

Q. What is this open door that no one can shut?

It is likely that this open door is the door of “Missionary Opportunity”

Paul when writing to the Church at Corinth says “For a great an effective door has opened to me and there are many adversaries”

(1 Corinthians 16: v. 9)

When Paul came to Troas, a door was opened to him by the Lord.

(2 Cor. 2: v.12)

Paul asked the Church at Colossae to pray for him that a door would open for him to preach Jesus Christ.

(Col.4: v.3)

When Paul came back to Antioch he told the people how God had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles.

(Acts 14: v.27)

This open door was particularly appropriate for the town of Philadelphia. It was a border town on the main postal route and the Roman armies always passed through this town.

Application

If we pray and seek God and are faithful to His word and do not compromise our faith, then God will certainly open a door of opportunity for each one of us wherever God has placed us.

To use that door is a privilege and responsibility.

Let us take every opportunity to witness about Jesus.

Once you pray for an opportunity, you need to be sensitive to the leading of the Holy Spirit.

Many years ago when I was a salesman I used to travel all over the west of England in my job.

At the time I was a member of the Gideons International.

We were encouraged to put New Testaments and give them out in appropriate situations.

One day I prayed for an opportunity to share about Jesus and it never came.

On my way home I noticed a lady standing by her car with a puncture (flat tyre)

I stopped the car to offer her some help to change the tyre.

She said that she had already called the A.A. which is like the JAF and they would come to change the tyre.

I waited to talk to the lady and was prompted to offer her a New Testament which she gladly took.

We don't need to carry New Testaments around with us, but if you are praying for opportunities it is good to have quality Bible tracts to give out.

Many of these are available free of charge.

We have plenty in our office.

The second promise that Jesus gives the faithful church is that the Jews that were lying to them, called the synagogue of Satan, will one day worship before their feet. They will also know about God's love to the faithful church.

This promise is an echo of a number of similar promises made concerning the Jews in the Old Testament.

Isaiah 60: v. 14 – N.K.J.,

¹⁴ Also the sons of those who afflicted you Shall come bowing to you, And all those who despised you shall fall prostrate at the soles of your feet; And they shall call you The City of the LORD, Zion of the Holy One of Israel.

Zechariah 8: v. 20-23.

²⁰ “Thus says the LORD of hosts: ‘Peoples shall yet come, Inhabitants of many cities; ²¹ The inhabitants of one city shall go to another, saying, “Let us continue to go and pray before the LORD, And seek the LORD of hosts. I myself will go also.” ²² Yes, many peoples and strong nations Shall come to seek the LORD of hosts in Jerusalem, And to pray before the LORD.’ ²³ “Thus says the LORD of hosts: ‘In those days ten men from every language of the nations shall grasp the sleeve of a Jewish man, saying, “Let us go with you, for we have heard *that God is with you.*””

The book of Revelation is all about prophecy of future events.

Therefore, one day it will happen.

Today, most nations of the world are against Israel and the Jewish nation.

You will be surprised about the propaganda and lies that are told around the world about the Jewish nation.

But one day, yes one day, 10 men from every language in the world will grasp the sleeve of a Jewish man saying, let us go with you, for we have heard that God is with you.

I am very sad about the persecution of Jewish people over 2,000 years, especially by Hitler in the 2nd world war who killed millions of Jews.

However, I am very happy that one day God will reverse the situation and people will be humbled before the Jews.

Those Jewish people must still become believers of Jesus Christ and be part of God's world-wide Church.

The third promise that Jesus gives the faithful Church is that God will keep them from the hour of trial which will come upon the whole world.

So we are told that there will be a future trial that will affect the whole world. The faithful believers at Philadelphia will escape that trial.

The Bible is silent about the details of this particular trial, but it is not silent in the future chapters of Revelation about a big trial that will indeed come upon the whole world. This trial is described as the "Great Tribulation". We will deal with this in chapter 6-9.

On the 27th of November we will be in Revelation chapter 6.

There will be a break for Christmas and New Year messages and then come back to revelation chapter 7 on the 8th of January.

Finally in this letter we have a "Warning" and "Another Promise"

There are two warnings, the first is that Jesus is "**Coming Quickly**" and the second is to "**Hold on to what they have**"

Let us deal with the first warning.

You might well ask the question, it has been 2,000 years since this statement by Jesus, but He hasn't come back yet.

The idea of Jesus Christ coming back soon or quickly is continually used in the New Testament.

It is used in two ways.

Firstly, it is a warning to those people who don't care about Jesus and God's love in the gospel message.

Turn with me to Matthew Chapter 24: v. 45-51.

⁴⁵ "Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom his master made ruler over his household, to give them food in due season? ⁴⁶ Blessed is that servant whom his master, when he comes, will find so doing.

⁴⁷ Assuredly, I say to you that he will make him ruler over all his goods. ⁴⁸ But if that evil servant says in his heart, 'My master is delaying his coming,' ⁴⁹ and begins to beat his fellow servants, and to eat and drink with the drunkards, ⁵⁰ the master of that servant will come on a day when he is not looking for him and at an hour that he is not aware of, ⁵¹ and will cut him in two and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites. There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

None of us know when our lives will be terminated and to those whose lives come to an end suddenly, or live a full life, this is a warning that they will meet their maker and suddenly be confronted with Jesus.

True Story of an Evangelist in Liverpool England

On the morning of the 15th April 1989, an evangelist was preparing in prayer to visit a football stadium in England. He usually gave out Bible tracts but liked to have a large Bible text printed on a board that he carried with him.

He asked God which Bible text he should use that day.

God directed him to Amos Chapter 4: v. 12. "**Prepare to meet your God**" He painted this text on a large board for all to see.

Thousands of people passed him on the way to the football match.

That day 96 football (soccer) supporters were crushed to death, and 766 were injured.

Although there was an inquiry afterwards there were lots of cover ups and eventually another enquiry was conducted. It resulted in the longest court case in history. It took just over two years.

God knew about the disaster before it happened.

For these 96 people, Jesus came very quickly.

Nobody expects to be crushed to death at a soccer match, but we must at all times be prepared to meet our God.

The second way in which the warning of Jesus Christ is used in the New Testament relates to a comfort for those under persecution.

James 5: v. 8

⁸You also be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand.

Hebrews 10: v. 37.

³⁷“For yet a little while, *And* He who is coming will come and will not tarry.

The second warning was to “Hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown.”

Jesus was telling the faithful church to hold on to their faithfulness.

If they didn’t do that then maybe Jesus would choose someone else.

If we are not faithful in the work that God has chosen us to do, His work will continue but He will choose someone else.

The Old Testament is full of people who failed God and they were replaced by another person in order to fulfil God’s purposes.

Saul lost his place to David – 1 Samuel 16: v. 1,13.

Shebna lost his place to Eliakim – Isaiah 22: v. 15-25.

The final promise comes in v. 12

¹² He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he shall go out no more. 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 out of heaven from My God. And *I will write on him* My new name.

Peter, James and John were pillars of the early church. (Gal.2: v.9)

A pillar is a picture of a healthy support.

Most buildings in those days were held together by pillars. They were an important part of the structure.

In Philadelphia at that time, when a priest died after a lifetime of faithfulness, men honoured him, by erecting a new pillar in the temple in which he had served and by inscribing his name and the name of his father on the pillar.

On the faithful Christian Jesus Christ will write God’s name and the New Jerusalem.

The faithful believers were going to be given the citizenship of heaven, where the presence of God would always be.

(Ezekiel 48: v. 35)

May God help us to be faithful and to serve Him where He wants us to be.

God has a place for everybody to serve that is faithful.

Q. Have you found your place?