

Revelation. Philadelphia- a Faithful Church
Revelation 3 v 7-13

It is in Christ's hands whether a congregation flourishes or not. Members may work hard, sing and preach with all their might but ultimately, unless the Lord builds the house, unless the Spirit bears godly fruit, unless God gives the increase our human activity achieves little or nothing.

It's in Christ's hands how these seven representative congregations in Revelation 2 & 3 are going to turn out, but here is the amazing thing – the Lord shares His concern for the world and the responsibility for His mission with the members of His Church. He shares the vision, the burden, the honour with ordinary Christians like us. Peter and Paul and John were human beings who sometimes did great things but also at times got things wrong, yet Jesus entrusted the precious Gospel to such people.

In 2 Corinthians 4, Paul writes it's like putting costly treasure in fragile jars of clay and yet this is how God chooses to operate – investing His own Holy Spirit to live and work in weak, flawed individuals like you and me. It seems an awful risk and yet God is honoured and the Gospel of Christ seen as all the more convincing as He produces Christ-like fruit in our lives. Family members, workmates, neighbours, schoolmates are our witnesses as nasty, selfish, corrupt people are being transformed into more loving, patient, forgiving and joyful people just like our Master Jesus. And this can prove wonderfully infectious!

Of course, if you're still a nasty, selfish and joyless person you may need to ask yourself one or two questions: 1 – did you ever truly become a Christian in the first place? Or 2 – are you currently committed and submitted to Christ and actively seeking His deliverance from spirits of resentment and jealousy and so on, so that His Spirit may continue the good work of sanctification which He has begun?

Well, the congregation in 1st century Philadelphia was not large but they were faithful first and foremost to Jesus. They sought to keep His Word and honour His name even though they were having to endure opposition from a group of Pharisaical Jews. They weren't many or influential in their society but they were growing in the love, joy and peace of the Spirit. They were living fruitful, God-pleasing lives in Christ and so here's what Jesus says to them. I am going to use you in a mighty way to spread the Gospel. I am opening a door of unprecedented opportunity for mission for you. Because you have proved faithful in little things, I will entrust you with greater things.

The Lord uses an illustration from the Old Testament in Isaiah 22 where a self-important court official is replaced by a more worthy doorkeeper to welcome guests into the royal court. Christ now holds this 'key of David' and He shares the honour with His fruitful followers, to proclaim His Gospel. While some will reject it and be shut out, we will have the pleasure of welcoming many others into the Kingdom of God!

Philadelphia was situated where several trade routes crossed and was a strategic centre for the dissemination of news and ideas. With the blessing of the risen Christ on His little church there, it now became a centre for missionary opportunity.

It's interesting to note that out of 7 congregations, Philadelphia is one of only 2 about which the Lord has nothing negative to say. They are a fruitful fellowship. He is pleased with them and is blessing them with greater responsibility and opportunity. He urges them to "hold on", to stay on this path of Christ centred devotion, humble righteousness and fruitful spiritual growth and witness and encourages them with several assurances.

While false, legalistic religious types will be shamed, sincere, fruitful, faithful Christians will be kept in times of trial. The Greek in v10 can mean 'keep you from the hour of trial' or 'through the hour of trial'.

Some of it He will protect us from, some if it He will help us through, but it won't overcome us.

As we overcome challenges in His strength for His glory He will make us like pillars in God's Temple and identify us very clearly as His. A pillar is a symbol of permanence, something that is solid and dependable and established there to remain for a long time. Fruitful Christians are always welcomed by God in His house. He establishes and blesses our work. And we are given a profound 3-fold identity from the Lord. Jesus says He will write God's name on us and the name of the new Jerusalem and His own new name.

Have you ever been somewhere where they give you an ID badge with your name which shows you're entitled to be there? Well Jesus promises His faithful an ID badge like no other, for it identifies us as children of Almighty God, citizens of Heaven with an inheritance in the coming resurrection and followers of Jesus Christ, risen Saviour and Light of the World.

So what shall we do? Is Christ by His Spirit seeking to work in us to produce spiritual fruit? Is He putting before us an open door of great opportunity for fresh Gospel mission in our day? Is He providing us with an ID as those blessed by heaven?

What shall we say? Yes, yes and yes! Or no thank you, no and no. Each of us must decide as individuals.

He who has ears willing to hear what God the Spirit is saying to His Church, let him hear!

Amen