

Philadelphia: The Faithful Church

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- [0 : 0 0] But if we could, this evening, with the Lord's help and the Lord's enabling, if we could turn back to that portion of Scripture that we read, the book of Revelation, chapter 3.
- Revelation, chapter 3, we're looking at verses 7 to 13 this evening. I have to be honest, there's so much in it.
- I feel I'm only scratching the surface. But we'll read again at verse 7. And so on.
- And so on.
- What would Jesus say about our church? As you know, that's a question we've been asking as we're going through these seven churches in Asia.
- [1 : 3 4] What would Jesus say about our church? What would he say about Barba's Free Church? What would he say about the spiritual temperature and the spiritual temperament of our church? And it's always a solemn question, a very searching question.
- Because would Jesus condemn us? Would he commend us? Would he comfort us? Would he correct us? Would he console us? Would he critique us? What would Jesus say about Barba's Free Church?
- And as we said before, a healthy gospel church is not about figures. It's about faith. It's not about quantity. It's about quality. It's not about goals.
- It's about godliness. It's not about popularity with other people. It's about preaching and pastoring and praying. A healthy gospel church is focused and fixated upon Jesus.
- Jesus Christ and Jesus Christ alone. And that's the vision that was revealed to John. As we said before, this is an apocalypse. It's an apocalypse.
- [2 : 3 4] God is lifting the lid. He's pulling back the curtain. He's unveiling this great vision that seeks to reveal Jesus Christ. As the ruling, reigning, and risen king who is going to return.
- And this revelation, this apocalypse, is for the church in every century. We've said that as we've looked at every single church. The seven churches in Asia, they symbolize every church in every century.
- They symbolize the universal church of Jesus Christ. But they're not only symbolic, they're also specific. They set before us all the sins and the struggles and the stresses and the strains that face the church in every century.
- And so this evening, as you can see, we've reached the sixth of the seven churches in Asia, which is Philadelphia. Philadelphia we've called the faithful church.
- It's the faithful church. And Philadelphia, it's an interesting church because Philadelphia has often been described as the rose between two thorns. It's the rose between two thorns.
- [3 : 4 3] Because in Revelation chapter 3, as you can see the way the chapter is set out, you have Sardis in the first six verses. That is the dead church. And then on the other side of Philadelphia, you have Laodicea, the lukewarm church.

And Philadelphia is right in the middle. It's the rose between the two thorns. It's the rose between the dead church and the lukewarm church. Which is why we need to look at this church this evening.

And we see that Philadelphia is the faithful church. They remain faithful to Jesus despite the obstacles that they encountered and the opposition that they experienced. It's the rose between two thorns.

The faithful church of Philadelphia. I want us to think about this church under two headings. Two headings, a word of commendation and a word of commitment.

And what you'll notice about this church is that there's no word of correction. There's no word of condemnation. There's a word of commendation and a word of commitment. They received a good report from Jesus.

[4 : 49] The only church, you could say, that received a good report from Jesus. So first of all, we see a word of commendation. A word of commendation. Jesus writes, To the angel of the church in Philadelphia write, The words of the Holy One, the true one, who has the key of David, Who opens and no one will shut, Who shuts and no one opens.

As you know, in our study from, in these seven churches, It began in Revelation chapter 2. And we saw the first four of these seven churches.

The first church was Ephesus. There it is. The loveless church. Because despite its deep history and sound and solid theology, Ephesus, as you remember, They became legalistic in their head and loveless in their heart.

Then we moved 35 miles north to the seaport city of Smyrna. And we saw there that the church in Smyrna was the persecuted church. So they were persecuted because they refused to concede and confess Kaiser Curios, that Caesar is Lord.

Instead, they continued to confess, as Christians should, That Jesus is Lord. Jesus is Lord. We then traveled a further 60 miles north to the Acropolis city of Pergamos, Which has become known to us as the compromising church.

[6 : 14] Where many in Pergamos were conceding to the world, And they were compromising their Christianity In what had become Satan's summit city. Then we moved 45 miles southeast.

We started moving down towards Thyatira, Which was the tolerant church. Thyatira was this trade town. It was built upon business. It had prospering working class people.

But it was all to the detriment of the disciples of Jesus. Christian businessmen and businesswomen, They were being challenged to concede And even compromise their Christianity In order to build their business.

Then last time we moved into Revelation chapter 3, We saw the first thorn in this chapter. We saw the church in Sardis, Which is known and remembered as the dead church.

They had a reputation of being alive to all other people. But Jesus said, You are dead. It's not a reputation that any church wants to have.

[7 : 19] Every church wants to have the reputation of Philadelphia, The church that we're considering this evening. It's the rose between two thorns. Because Philadelphia was the faithful church.

Philadelphia is the faithful church. Now the city of Philadelphia, It's known, Well, the modern city you could say, It's known as Al-Azahiyah. It's in western Turkey.

It's about 30 miles southeast of Sardis. And Philadelphia though, As a city, It was founded in 189 BC. And it was given its name by its founder.

Its founder was King Eumenes II. He was actually the king from the north, From Pergamos. He was the king of Pergamos. In the city of Pergamos.

The satanic city of Pergamos. But King Eumenes II, He named this city Philadelphia, Not because of the cream cheese that we all know and all love. But he named this city in honour of his brother, Atalus.

[8 : 21] Now I don't know if I'm pronouncing his name correctly, But his name was Atalus II. And Atalus, his brother, Had shown loyalty and love to Eumenes. And Eumenes, he named his brother Atalus.

He named him Philadelphus. So he had this nickname Philadelphus. And so when King Eumenes founded this new city, He named the city after his brother.

He called it Philadelphia. And as you know, The name Philadelphia, It means brotherly love. So the name Philadelphia means brotherly love.

But you know what's beautiful is that This city of brotherly love, In this city of brotherly love, Was the church in Philadelphia. And the church in Philadelphia Lived up to its name.

What a great thing to be said about a church, That it lives up to its name. The church in Philadelphia Was known as the church of brotherly love. Now the church in Philadelphia Wasn't a large church.

[9 : 25] It didn't have an enviable membership. It didn't have this great ministry team That ran the church so perfectly. No, the church in Philadelphia Was this small Christian church Living within its community.

Seeking to display and demonstrate Christ's love To their community. And to show it To the congregation. And the thing is, The church in Philadelphia They had this spirit of love.

Everything was bound up In love. They had this spirit of love For one another. In which they loved their members They loved their revealed brotherly love.

They were a church That lived up to their name. And they lived up to the commandment of Jesus. Because you remember Jesus' commandment to the church in the upper room, to those who were there for the Last Supper.

Jesus said, I knew commandment I give to you, that you love one another. As I have loved you, you also are to love one another.

[10 : 48] For by this, said Jesus, all people will know that you are my disciples if you have love for one another. So the love of Christ was displayed and it was demonstrated by the church in Philadelphia.

That's what defined them. They were defined by their love. They were the church of Philadelphia, the church of brotherly love. And needless to say that this love of Christ, that they displayed, that they demonstrated, that love of Christ should be displayed and demonstrated in our church too.

We should be a church of Philadelphia. Do you know, I was thinking even singing tonight. Do you know, I do, I love all of you. I absolutely love, I look at you all and I know you individually and as a congregation.

And I have to say, I love you all. And you know, that's the way it should be, that we have this brotherly and sisterly love for one another. We should be the church of Philadelphia, the church of brotherly and sisterly love.

Because you know, the love of Christ, it should define us. It should describe us as a congregation. And it should describe us as a congregation living within our community.

[12 : 04] You know, people should say about us, they should say about us, see how they love one another. See how they love one another.

How they're always happy together. How they're always happy to be in each other's company. How they're always happy to share with one another and spend time with one another. See how they love one another.

And yet, you know, this command of Jesus to love one another, it's a command that's often repeated. It's re-emphasized, it's restated throughout the New Testament by all of the apostles.

And it's restated and re-emphasized and reaffirmed because it's the one thing we often fail to do. We fail to love one another as Christ has loved us.

We fail to love one another as Christ has loved us. And the thing is, we all know tonight. We all know that Christ loves us.

[13 : 06] We all know that. We were all singing about that. I love the Lord because my voice and prayers he did hear. We love him because he first loved us.

We all know that Christ loves us and we all know how he has loved us. Because he displayed, he's demonstrated his love to us through his death upon the cross. He loved us.

He gave himself for us. He laid down his life for us. He said to us, greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. We know that Christ loves us.

We know how much he loves us. And we know how he has loved us. Which is why we're called as the church to love one another. And to keep loving one another as much as Christ has loved us.

We're to be a church full of Philadelphia. Full of Philadelphia. Full of brotherly and sisterly love. That said, let's not fall into the trap of thinking that the church in Philadelphia was a perfect church.

[14 : 16] It wasn't a perfect church. As you know, there's no such thing as a perfect church. You'll remember the words of the late evangelist, Billy Graham. He said, if you ever find the perfect church, don't join it.

Because you will only spoil it. So if you ever find the perfect church, don't join it. You'll only spoil it. And you know, it's this letter to the faithful church in Philadelphia.

It's the reason why even our Confession of Faith. If you were to look up the Confession of Faith, our Westminster Confession of Faith. And chapter 25, which talks about the church of Christ.

We were actually looking at it last night with Professor Gerangus MacLeod. And it says there that even the purest churches under heaven are subject to both mixture and error.

But some have so degenerated that they are no longer a church of Christ, but a synagogue of Satan. Nevertheless, there shall be always a church on earth to worship God according to his will.

[15 : 20] And that statement in the Confession, it's actually taken, or the footnote, or the reference, is to this section in Scripture. The church, the faithful church in Philadelphia.

Because even though the church in Philadelphia was a model church, it wasn't a perfect church. And there were some in the church who, as we read, and even as the Confession confesses, there were some in the church who were of the synagogue of Satan.

You see that there in verse 9. Behold, I will make those of the synagogue of Satan who say that they are Jews and are not, but lie. So there were some in the church who were of this synagogue of Satan.

And we've seen that phrase, synagogue of Satan, before. We saw it with the church in Smyrna, who were the persecuted church. And we see it now here with the church in Philadelphia. Jesus commends the church in Smyrna for their faithfulness and their fervency in the midst of persecution.

And he commends the church in Philadelphia here for their faithfulness and for finding favor with Jesus. But the thing about both these faithful churches, Smyrna and Philadelphia, is that they both had this thorn in the flesh.

[16 : 36] They both had this little fox in their church that sought to spoil the vine. And it came in the form of the synagogue of Satan. And it's very difficult to understand who they were exactly.

But it seems to be the synagogue of Satan. It seems to be this sect in the church who claimed to be Jewish Christians. They claimed to be converted Jews.

So they were brought up as Jews, then converted to Christianity. But they weren't actually converted. And they were, as Jesus describes, they were actually the synagogue of Satan.

They appeared as an angel of light. They appeared as those who were Christians among the church in Philadelphia and the church in Smyrna. They appeared as they were one with them.

But they showed their true self over time. Where they had this front and this facade of faithfulness. They were very like the Pharisees.

[17 : 37] They were legalistic and yet at the same time, they were lawless. They were loyal to the church in Philadelphia. And yet they were loveless.

And that's what distinguished them as the synagogue of Satan. They were loveless. They were devoted. And yet they were deceitful. They were the synagogue of Satan. And as the synagogue of Satan, when you read about it, they victimized and they even vilified the true church of Jesus Christ.

They stood out from those within the congregation because they didn't love as Christ loved. What made the church in Philadelphia a faithful church was that those who were in it, those who were the faithful ones, they loved one another.

And that was displayed. That was demonstrated. But the synagogue of Satan, they didn't. And that's why Jesus says in verse 9, I will make those of the synagogue of Satan who say that they are Jews and are not, but lie.

Behold, I will make them come and bow down before your feet and they will learn that I have loved you. You know, despite their many flaws and their failures and their failings, the church in Philadelphia, they were a church that found favor with Jesus.

[18 : 58] They found favor with Jesus. Which is why we see, secondly, that there was this word of commitment. So there was a word of commendation. They were commended. But then there's this word of commitment from Jesus.

A word of commitment, secondly. We see that in verse 7, Jesus says, To the angel of the church in Philadelphia write, As we said, the church in Philadelphia, it was a model church for many other churches.

Not because it was the perfect church, because as a church it had many flaws, failings and failures. But they were a model church because they found favor with Jesus.

And they were faithful to Jesus. As a church, they displayed and they demonstrated the love of Christ. It's what defined them. They were this church that loved one another, apart from those who were of the synagogue of Satan.

They were the church of brotherly love. And you know, in his commentary, Joel Beakey, he writes, Philadelphia is a prominent example of what a church ought to be.

[20 : 28] The fruits of grace abounded in the church as Christ worked in her, by his word and Holy Spirit. In commending this church, Christ is placing a crown upon the work he has done in her midst.

But you know, Christ here is not only commending the church, he's also showing his commitment to this church, because she had found favor in his sight.

And they had found favor, not because of their faithfulness, but because of Christ's faithfulness to them. He was so faithful to them as a church, and they recognized that.

That's why they loved one another, as Christ loved them. They sought to respond in love, because of the love that has been demonstrated to them. And you know, it's the same with us.

It's not that we've done anything to save ourselves, but what Christ has done for us. We don't love, because, we don't love one another just because we want to love one another.

[21 : 30] We love one another because Christ has loved us. He's shown us an example. He's demonstrated it to us, that we are to love one another as Christ has loved us.

And for the church in Philadelphia, this church of brotherly love, they found favor with Jesus, and they were faithful to Jesus, because Jesus favored them, and Jesus was faithful to them.

And you know, what's amazing about this church, is that they exemplified, and they even exercised, the fruit of the Spirit. As the Holy Spirit was at work in them, and as that, as the work of God, grew in their life, and germinated in their life, it bore fruit, the fruit of the Spirit.

And as you know, the first fruit, it's not fruits, or to possess all of them. It's the fruit of the Spirit. The first outworking of the fruit of the Spirit, is love.

Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. The church in Philadelphia, they were a church that exemplified, they exercised the fruit of the Spirit, because the Holy Spirit was at work in them.

[22 : 49] You know, it was Peter's good friend, John Owen, he said of the Holy Spirit, He who is the Spirit of love, is love.

All his actings towards us, and in us, are fruits of love. And they all leave an impression of love, upon our souls. And that was true of the church in Philadelphia.

They were the church of brotherly love. They experienced, they exemplified, they exercised, the spiritual fruit of love. And the church in Philadelphia, it was a favoured church.

It was a faithful church. It was a fruitful church, all because Jesus was committed to them. Jesus was committed to them. That was the cause of Philadelphia, being favoured, and faithful, and fruitful.

And we see that because, when Jesus introduces his message, to the church in Philadelphia, he says there in verse 7, he says, the words of the Holy One, the true one, who has the key of David, who opens and no one will shut, who shuts and no one will open.

[23 : 56] Jesus describes himself, as the Holy One, the true one, and even the powerful one. That's what he says. And as the Holy One, the true one, and the powerful one, Jesus says that, he is the one who has the key of David, who opens and no one will shut, and who shuts and no one will open.

And what Jesus is doing there, he's actually quoting from the Old Testament. He's quoting from Isaiah. He's giving us this messianic prophecy about himself. A prophecy where Isaiah wrote, I will place on his shoulder, the key of the house of David.

He shall open and none shall shut, and he shall shut and none shall open. And Jesus is just emphasizing to the church in Philadelphia, he's that messianic king.

He is God's king in God's world. And as God's king in God's world, he has the keys to salvation. He has the keys to the kingdom. And he opens and closes the door of salvation and the kingdom of heaven to whosoever he will.

Whosoever he will. The words of the Holy One, the true one, who has the key of David, who opens and no one will shut, who shuts and no one will open.

[25 : 17] But you know, as Peter, not our Peter, but the apostle Peter, Peter discovered the keys to salvation and the kingdom of heaven. Those keys, they don't refer to the first pope.

But when Jesus talks about this in Matthew 18, he's talking about, when he talks about the keys to the kingdom, he's talking about Peter's confession. The confession of the Christian.

You remember when Jesus asked there in Matthew 18, who do you say that I am? And Peter comes forward and he's claiming and committing his life to Jesus and he's confessing, saying, you are the Christ, the son of the living God.

And as you know, when we come forward, when we claim, when we confess our allegiance to Jesus and commit our life to Jesus, we make the same confession.

You are the Christ, the son of the living God. And it was then that we discovered, like Peter discovered, Jesus unlocking that door of salvation with the keys of the kingdom.

[26 : 24] You know, it was when we came to confess Christ as Lord that the door was opened, a door of salvation that no man can shut. And it's only Jesus that opens it for us.

You know, my friend, Jesus is the holy one, the true one, the powerful one. He is the one who is the key of David, who opens and no one will shut, who shuts and no one will open.

And he was committed to the church in Philadelphia because they were committed to him. They were favoured, they were faithful, they were fruitful. And it was all because they simply continued to claim and confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.

That's what Jesus is saying to them. You are a church that is loved. You are a church that is faithful because you continue to claim and confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.

And you know, it's with that that Jesus gives this concluding promise of perseverance. He gives this promise of perseverance to the church of Philadelphia. He says in verse 10, Because you have kept my word about patient endurance, I will keep you from the hour of trial that is coming on the whole world to try those who dwell on earth.

[27 : 45] I am coming soon. Hold fast what you have so that no one may seize your crown. The one who conquers, I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God.

Never shall he go out of it. And 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 from my God out of heaven and my own new name.

And you see there that phrase, my God, repeated again and again and again and again. Jesus is emphasizing his faithfulness to them as a church.

And he's calling them, he's calling them to persevere in their faithfulness to him as his people, to keep loving him and loving one another as he has loved them and gave himself for them.

And Jesus concludes, he says right at the end, he who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. As you said before, that's the call, that's the command to react, to respond to the message to the church.

[28 : 59] Because how we hear affects our heart. How we hear affects our heart. And what we should hear from the church in Philadelphia is that in order to be a church of Philadelphia, in order to be a church full of brotherly love and sisterly love, in order to love one another as Christ has loved us, we need to keep claiming.

We need to keep committing ourselves. We need to keep confessing that Jesus Christ is Lord. And you know, it seems simple, doesn't it? It seems so simple and straightforward.

But the reality is, there's often a huge disconnect between information and application. That's the hard part, the way we need to keep claiming and keep committing ourselves and keep confessing that Jesus Christ is Lord.

That in doing so, we will be like the church of Philadelphia. We'll be a church of brotherly and sisterly love. But more than that, we'll be favoured. We'll be faithful.

And we'll be fruitful. A fruitful church of Jesus Christ. And Jesus says to us, He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

[30 : 23] Well, may the Lord bless these few thoughts to us. Let us pray. O Lord, our gracious God, we give thanks to Thee for Thy love towards us.

That God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son. And how He gave Him. How He gave Him willingly and freely. How He gave Him to be the sacrifice to satisfy divine justice.

And we thank Thee that He was wounded for our transgressions, bruised for our insolence, iniquities. That through His love and even through His death that we have that great promise of eternal life.

But help us, Lord, we pray, to see that we love Him because He first loved us. And Lord, help us to respond to His love by loving Jesus daily, but by loving one another as Christ hath loved us.

And Lord, we confess how often we fall short, but help us to look at one another and to love one another and to live for Jesus, realising that He has died and He rose again and lives forevermore for us.

[31 : 38] Lord, bless us together as a people that we would be like the Church of Philadelphia, that we would be faithful, that we would be fruitful, that we would be those who keep looking to Jesus, confessing Him and knowing Him and loving Him as the author and the finisher of our faith.

Oh, Lord, bless us together, we pray. Bind us together that Thou wouldst use us for Thy glory and ultimately for the furtherance of Thy kingdom, that souls would be won to Christ and that even our community would be able to say, see how they love one another and how they love Jesus and how we love Jesus so much that we love our community and we want them to love Him too.

Lord, remember us then, we pray, remember our homes, our families, our loved ones. We commit all such to Thy care, knowing, Lord, that without Thee we can do nothing, but with Thee all things are possible.

Cleanse us, we pray, and go before us for Jesus' sake. Amen. Well, we're going to bring our service to our conclusion this evening.

We'll sing in Psalm 31. Psalm 31. It's in the Scottish Psalter. Page 243.

[33 : 00] Psalm 31 and verse 21. And we're singing down to the end of the psalm. All praise and thanks be to the Lord for He hath magnified His wondrous love to me within a city fortified.

For from thine eyes cut off I am I in my haste hath said, my voice yet heardst thou when to thee with cries my moan I made. O love the Lord all ye His saints because the Lord doth guard the faithful and He plenteously proud doers doth reward.

Be of good courage and He strength and to your heart shall send all ye whose hope and confidence doth on the Lord depend. So these verses of Psalm 31 to God's praise.

All praise and thanks be to the Lord of you.

For here are magnified His wondrous love to be within a city fortified.

[34 : 25] For from thy life at all I am I am my haste that said my voice yet heardst thou when to thee with cries my moan I bid.

O love the Lord all ye hear His saints because the Lord doth guard the faithful and he plenteously proud doers doth reward.

he of good courage and he strength unto your heart shall send all ye whose hope and confidence that on the Lord depend.

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ the love of God the Father and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all now and forevermore. Amen. Amen. Amen.

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