

Philadelphia: The Loyal Church Revelation 3:7-13

Introduction:

In West Philadelphia born and raised
On the playground is where I spent most of my day
Chillin' out, maxing, relaxing all cool
And all shootin' some b-ball outside of the school
When a couple of guys who were up to no good
Started making trouble in my neighborhood
I got in one little fight and my mom got scared
She said, "You're moving with your auntie and uncle in Bel-Air."

As a former resident of the city of Philadelphia, it is almost impossible to consider this morning's text, and the sixth church addressed by the apostle John, without thinking of my former stomping ground—Philly.

Thinking of this theme music from the 90's comedy—The Fresh Prince—is also irresistible particularly considering the premise of the show. There was trouble in Philadelphia, and the remedy for Will Smith was to leave in order to be saved from himself and his surroundings.

Similarly, in Revelation 3:7-13, we meet the church experiencing trouble in Philadelphia. But unlike Will Smith, the remedy was not to leave Philadelphia, but based on the keeping power of the Lord Jesus, to be kept while in Philly.

Therefore, The loyalty of Jesus Christ to his church produced a loyalty of the church to Jesus Christ.

The Message:

**The Loyal Christ is faithful and able to Keep a Loyal Church.
Because He is loyal to you, He is able keep you loyal to Him.**

Brothers and Sisters,

**Do not just assume you are able to keep yourself from falling
and present yourselves faultless before his presence with joy.**

- Yes the Bible says we must endure to the end.
- But it never says, we must endure through our will power, but rather through reliance in HIS POWER.

The most experienced climbers fasten themselves to more secure foundations.

Let us learn from the church at Philadelphia— a church loyal to Christ by the power of him who is loyal to him.

Facts about Ancient Philadelphia and its Church

- Persecution is the context of the church and therefore this letter.
- Tensions existed between Jews in the synagogue and the Christians in Philadelphia.
- Tensions also existed between the church the Roman Empire, and broader society.
- Despite these challenges the church of Philadelphia is known for its faithfulness to Jesus.
- Along with Smyrna, Philadelphia is one of two churches that Jesus finds no fault with.
- With pledges and promises Jesus Christ only affirms and encourages this particular church.
- Since we are told in v. 13 that we are to “hear what the Spirit says to the *churches*—he is encouraging the church today be strengthened by his faithfulness.

Authoritative Introduction (3:7)

⁷“And 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.

Jesus is “the holy one”

Holy – “*to be separate and apart*” from anything that is NOT God and NOT good. He is in a class by himself.

Is 40:25: *Who then will you compare me, that I should be like him, says the Holy One.*

- In Isaiah – “holy one” (20x – exclusively of Yahweh)
- In the Gospels – demons and disciples call Jesus “the holy one of God.”

Jesus is the Faithful One

– He is dependable and totally trustworthy.

“Holy & True” = (ex. 6:10)

- Together it is used to describe the Sovereign Lord.
- Jesus is the Sovereign Lord who does what’s right all the time!

The church needs a God who is God all the time.

ILLUST. Steph Curry’s One Poor Stat

Curry is arguably the NBA’s greatest shooter of all times yet a stat came out that in the last 20 seconds of the game when the game is on the line, and winning and loosing is in the balance, Steph is 0-8. Point: He is who you normally want shooting except in the final 20 sec of a game when the game is on the line.

- Jesus is morally and consistently dependable
- He’ll “start a work and he’ll finish it!”
- From everlasting to everlasting he is God.
- He’s a **giver of perfect gifts** as a norm (“no shadow of turning”).

Jesus has “the Keys”

- Jesus declares not only his perfect morality, and his total reliability, BUT also his absolute AUTHORITY!

(V. 7) *Who has “the key of David,” who opens and no one will shut, who shuts and no one opens.*

In Rev 1:18 – Jesus has the “**key to Death and the Grave**” = the authority over “life and death.”

- Jesus determines who dies, if they die, and when they die.
- Jesus determines who lives, when they live, how long they live.

Proof: He healed the sick. He raised the dead. He laid his life down, and got back up! He's got the keys!

“The Key of David”

Isaiah 22:20-22

God rejects a man named Shebna and affirms a servant named Eliakim

(v, 19) ¹⁹ I will thrust you from your office, and you will be pulled down from your station.

²⁰ In that day I will call my servant Eliakim the son of Hilkiah, ²¹ and I will clothe him with your robe, and will bind your sash on him, and will commit your authority to his hand. And he shall be a father to the inhabitants of Jerusalem and to the house of Judah. ²² **And 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.**

- Jesus is the dictator of who gets into God's kingdom and who doesn't.
- In John's Gospel Jesus says, He is the DOOR.
- Now Rev 3:7, through John, Jesus says He has the key!

Unbelievers

- If you don't get anything else get this. Jesus is the key to entering the Kingdom of God.
- He dictates the terms of entering and exiting.
- He says, “No one comes to the Father except through me (Jn 14:6).
- The cross is his OPEN INVITATION & HIS OPEN DOOR.
- Any other way is a DEAD END.
- He flings the door open – (ex. Pentecost, Samaria, Cornelius).
- **BEWARE:** He will also shut the door

“The Shut Door” – (Lk 13:24-28)

Strive to enter through the narrow door. For many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able. ²⁵ When once the master

of the house has risen and **shut the door**, and you begin to stand outside and to knock at the door, saying, 'Lord, open to us,' then he will answer you, 'I do not know where you come from.' ²⁶ Then you will begin to say, 'We ate and drank in your presence, and you taught in our streets.' ²⁷ But he will say, 'I tell you, I do not know where you come from. **Depart from me, all you workers of evil!**' ²⁸ In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God but you yourselves cast out.

The All-knowing Evaluation / Commendation (3:8)

⁸ “**I know your works.** Behold, I have set before you an open door, which no one is able to shut. I know that you have but little power, and yet **you have kept my word and have not denied my name.**”

What Christ Knows?

(v. 8) I know your works

(v. 8) I know your works . . . I know that you have little power, and yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name.

Jesus here again proclaims that he is intimately acquainted with the conditions that impact his people and the conduct of his people.

“I know your works (v 8)

- I know the kind of works you do,
- I Know the quality of works you do,
- I know the context and conditions affecting the works you do.

“Behold, I have set before you an “open door””

What is the “open door”?

1. An Open Door to Service (Effectiveness in gospel ministry)
2. An Open Door to Salvation (Permanence in God’s covenant community?)

“Open Door to Service” = Missionary Opportunity

- **1 Cor 16:8-9** - ⁸ But I will stay in Ephesus . . . ⁹ for **a wide door for effective work has opened to me**, and there are many adversaries.
- **Col 4:3** - pray also for us, that God may open to us a door for the word, to declare the mystery of Christ

Contextual Consideration

Philadelphia was nicknamed “gateway to the East” because it was so strategically located geographically speaking, that it was founded to be a missionary of Greek culture and language. Some have surmised that that even as Philadelphia had effectively exploited its “open door” to spread Greek culture and language, so the Church of Philadelphia was being given by God a missionary effectiveness to spread the gospel.

Conclusion: *“I know your works”* . . . You have been effective in walking through the “open door” of fruitful gospel ministry.

“Open Door to Salvation” = Permanence in God’s covenant community?

- **Revelation Use of “Open Door”** - Revelation does not describe “missionary activity.”
- **Contextual Consideration**
 - The holder of the Keys (v. 7) grants access into the messianic kingdom.
 - The key of David opens access to the Kingdom of David.
 - Philadelphia was being afflicted and ousted by Jewish persecutors, thrown out of synagogues, and harassed for their Christian beliefs.
 - So the “open door that no one could shut” is acceptance and permanence into Christ’s life, love, family.

Both Salvation and Service

- Fortified in Salvation should lead to Faithful service.

I know that you have little power, and yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name.

- **The Church of Philadelphia was a small church,**
- **unimpressive and uninfluential church (opposite of Sardis.)**

Our Weakness

I know the power you have, and it is not much.

I know the weakness you have, and it is real.

I know the lack you have, and it is substantial.

- **No acceptance**
- **No influence**
- **No significance**

... yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name.

- The church had been afflicted but yet remained faithful—loyal.
- You did not deviate from obeying me.
- You did not detach from identifying with me.
- Philadelphian Church didn't "TURN AWAY" or "TURN DOWN!"

Three Keys to Being a Loyal Church

- Faithful in doing gospel work
- Faithful to obey God's word
- Faithful in being Jesus' witnesses

"Faithfulness" is Key

- **Faithful in doing gospel work.**
 - We spread gospel culture like Philadelphia spread Greek culture.
 - We pray for opportunities and seek prayer for them.
 - We capitalize on opportunities and "make the most of them." (Col 4)
 - See Opposition = Opportunity! (1 Cor 16:9)
 - We see opportunities where there seem to be no opportunities.
ILLUST. The Kid that Saw Tootsie Rolls
ILLUST. John Harper (find)
- **Faithful to obey God's word.**
 - Nothing discredits a "gospel proclaimer" like godless living.

- **Titus 2:4-5** - the young women to love their husbands and children, ⁵ to be self-controlled, pure, working at home, kind, and submissive to their own husbands, **that the word of God may not be reviled.**
- **Titus 2:7-8** - the younger men . . . show yourself in all respects to be a model of good works, and in your teaching show integrity, dignity, ⁸ and sound speech that cannot be condemned, **so that an opponent may be put to shame, having nothing evil to say about us.**
- **Titus 2:7-8** - ⁹ Bondservants . . . they are to be well-pleasing, not argumentative, ¹⁰ not pilfering, but showing all good faith, **so that in everything they may adorn the doctrine of God our Savior.**
- **Faithful in being Jesus' witnesses.**
 - Philadelphia did not deny the name of Jesus the exalted king who has the keys!
 - Even when they were *outcasted, demoted, rejected, afflicted.*
 - The first thing to go is the explicit reference to the name of Jesus. Jesus is “the sandbag” we drop when we want to “go higher.”
 - We can be moral, positive, socially woke, etc., and yet be quiet in our affiliation with the “NAME!”

The Loyal Church is Faithful – work, word, and Jesus-witness.

The Appropriate Exhortation [Empowering Promises] (3:9-11)

Vindication

⁹ Behold, 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.

“I will make”

- Jesus The Lamb is also a Lion
- Jesus' the Prince of Peace is also the Lord of Hosts
- Jesus the Savior with Grace is also is Judge with a Gavel.

- Jesus is Woke – He understands injustice and he will right all wrongs.

“The synagogue of Satan”

– ethnic Jews that rejected Jesus and persecuted his believers.

“They say their Jews but they are not, they lie”

Romans 2:28 – 29

For no one is a Jew who is merely one outwardly, nor is circumcision outward and physical. ²⁹ But a Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter. His praise is not from man but from God.

Romans 9:6-7

For not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel, ⁷ and not all are children of Abraham because they are his offspring.

John 8

If you were Abraham’s children you would be doing the works Abraham did. You seek to kill me . . . this is not what Abraham did (8:39-40)

Abraham rejoiced to see my day . . . (8:56)

“behold, I will make them come and bow down before your feet,”

“Bow Down”

OT texts predict that Gentiles will come and bow down before Israel and Israel’s God in the last days.

Isaiah 45:14

¹⁴ Thus says the LORD:

“The wealth of Egypt and the merchandise of Cush,
and the Sabeans, men of stature,
shall come over to you and be yours;
they shall follow you;
they shall come over in chains and bow down to you.
They will plead with you, saying:
‘Surely God is in you, and there is no other,

no god besides him.”

Isaiah 49:23

²³ Kings shall be your foster fathers,
and their queens your nursing mothers.
With their faces to the ground they shall bow down to you,
and lick the dust of your feet.
Then you will know that I am the LORD;
those who wait for me shall not be put to shame.”

Isaiah 60:14

¹⁴ The sons of those who afflicted you
shall come bending low to you,
and all who despised you
shall bow down at your feet;

(v. 9b) “and they will learn that I have loved you.”

- Despite your lack of stature
- Despite your lack of influence
- Despite your lack of nobility
- They will “bow” and see “you are my beloved.”

“Beloved” – affection and election

The Church will receive what Israel rejects until Israel receives the Messiah they rejected.

ILLUST. How did he get her?

You ever see a person and wonder how they scooped their spouse.

We will be Messiah’s loved ones and everyone will know it.

Jesus Promises Vindication but also Preservation

Protection / Preservation

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 the earth.

“Because You have kept my word about patient endurance I will keep you”

- The Christian life is not a sprint but a marathon.
- It requires running the race with endurance (Heb. 12:2-3)
- Steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord.
- Philadelphian Christians obeyed Christ's message about remaining committed for the long haul.
- ***Your commitment will not be in vain but will be met by a greater commitment.***

Our Commitment – God's Commitment

- Keep yourself in the love of God – to him who is able to keep you. . .
- Work out your salvation – God is working in you. . .
- We love him because he first loved us . . .

“from the hour of trial”

This is not “a” hour of trial but “the hour of trial.”

- To be kept from the hour of trial has one parallel John 17:15 – Don't remove them from the world, protect them from the danger in the world.

***Ex. Hebrew boys were saved in the fire
Daniel saved in the den
Israel was saved in Goshen***

- ***This is not a local affliction but “Coming on the whole world”***
- ***To those who dwell on the earth.***
 - * These dwellers are unbelievers
 - * Focused on afflicting the unbelievers.
 - *Ex. The plagues

This a promise of protection not by removal but through his sustaining POWER. But also, his sustaining PRESENCE.

Visitation

¹¹ I am coming soon. Hold fast what you have, so that no one may seize your crown.

“I am coming soon” (present tense)

- Jesus is actually coming back!
- His visitation is Two-fold in purpose
 - Warn the unbeliever

- Warm the believer

“Hold fast” – urges them to stand firm on the promises, persist in their service through Christ’s power, drawing strength from the certainty of his bodily presence.

Hold fast . . . “so that no one may seize your crown.”

- *Stephanos* – wreath or crown - the symbol that you competed according to the rules. **Point:** Don’t lose reward.

Awe-Inspiring Conclusion (3:12-13)

¹²The one who conquers, I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God. Never shall he go out of it,

“I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God”

- **The Church that remains faithful is granted true security and new identity.**

Christians Who Endure Will Receive a Secured position in God’s Presence.

Contextual note:

It is worth noting that Philadelphia’s strategic location made it valuable but also vulnerable. It was situated on a great volcanic plain which on one hand was responsible for rich and fertile soil, which made Philadelphia one of the leading producers of grapes and wine.

On the flip side this volcanic plain also was plagued by earthquakes, tremors and aftershocks. In 17 AD Philadelphia was almost obliterated by an earthquake, and the tremors went on for years.

Historians say that many residents never moved back, but rather repositioned themselves on the outskirts. They lived in a constant state of fear, panic, insecurity.

“To be a pillar” . . . and never go out” is to be a permanent and significant fixture in the presence of God. Heaven is not heaven if Christ’s presence is not there.

The church of Philadelphia was used to insecurity and transience so they could appreciate a promised day when there is true security, and no threat of being driven out of the Lord’s acceptance or presence.

Christians Who Endure Will Be God’s Personal Possession.

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. ¹³He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.’

The faithful church will receive a 3-layered name.

- To “name it” is to “claim it”.
- To put your name on something is to put your claim on it.
- Jesus claims you as his own!

He gives you new names and names matter.

They tell you who you are and who’s you are.

Context:

- After the great earthquake Tiberius Caesar financed its recreation. He took his name and renamed Philadelphia—NeoCaesar. (New City of Caesar)
- Philly was also once changed to Flavia (in honor of the family name of the emperor Vespasian).
- The names did not stick, but Jesus says, my name will.
 - You will have my God’s name
 - You will have the New Jerusalem’s name
 - You will have Jesus’s new name.
 - He claims his church.
 - He identifies himself with his church.
 - He is not ashamed to put his signature on you.

Conclusion;

Philadelphia was loyal church, and loved by a Loyal Christ. She was faithful in her gospel work, faith to obey his word, faithful to be his witness for his glory. May we give ourselves to the holy pursuit of Christian faithfulness. It requires our work but his power (lawn mower ex.).

Rev. A. W. Fuller – 19th Century (from *The Negro Baptist Pulpit*)

For 4000 years, at least, the world had no Bible, no church, no preacher, according to our understanding of the term, no weekly religious services; yet, according to the eleventh chapter of the *Epistle to the Hebrews*, God had Christians before Christianity, and the grace of God kept them in all their trials; and today they are redeemed around the throne of God.

Of the twelve apostles, according to tradition, only one died a natural death; yet all, except “the son of perdition” died Christians. Look, for a moment, at post-apostolic ages. There is hardly an acre of ground in Europe that has not been bedewed with the blood of God’s saints. Many of the prisons, blocks and stakes are eloquent monuments of the power of God in preserving the souls of his people. They were made lamp posts for Rome. Yet they remain firm to the end, and preach their loudest sermons by their persevering attachment to their Lord and Master.

When they were burned at the stake, their ashes were carried by the providential winds, and wherever a grain dropped, a church of the living God sprang up. Their dying shouts were carried far and near, and men soon learned that it was the planting of God’s hand, and could not be pulled up.

Now we ask, if Christians have stood greater trials than we are having, with less advantages than we have, and God enabled them to be faithful to the end, is it unfair for us to believe that the same grace that Christians in the days of Able, Noah, David, Paul and Luther, will keep us today?

Come Thou Fount

**Oh, to grace how great a debtor
Daily I'm constrained to be
Let that goodness like a fetter
Bind my wandering heart to Thee
Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it
Prone to leave the God I love
Here's my heart, oh, take and seal it
Seal it for Thy courts above**