



Overview

Author: John

Date: c 95 AD

Purpose: John writes these letters to continue the pastoral care to the congregations established by St. Paul. He writes to bring the words of His vision of the exalted Jesus Christ to the churches.

Outline:

A. Vision of the Exalted Christ (Revelation 1:9-20)

B. Letters to the Seven Churches

- Letter to Ephesus (2:1-7)
- Letter to Smyrna (2:8-11)
- Letter to Pergamum (2:12-17)
- Letter to Thyatira (2:18-28)
- Letter to Sardis (3:1-6)
- Letter to Philadelphia (3:7-13)**
- Letter to Laodicea (3:14-22)

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The 7 Churches of the Revelation Revelation 3:7-13

is now, and will be forever. | Amen.

Prayer: Blessed Lord, You have caused all Holy Scriptures to be written for our learning. Grant that we may so hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them that, by the patience and comfort of Your holy Word, we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Letter Six: To the Church in Philadelphia "Christ's Encouragement to the Patiently Enduring Church"

Read Revelation 3:7-13

The City

The city of Philadelphia ("brotherly love") was thirty miles southeast of Sardis. The city took "its name from the legendary loyalty of the brothers Eumenes and Attalus" (Strelan, 82). Attalus was the founder of Philadelphia. It was a commercial center and the "gateway to the East" (Brighton, *Revelation*, 89). The area was on a volcanic plain and subject to earthquakes – a large one in 17 AD clung to local memory and forced reconstruction of the city.

Strelan notes that "In later history Christian Asia was overtaken by Islam. Philadelphia, however, remained a free and independent city. It was the last Christian outpost in Asia Minor until it fell in 1390" (Strelan, 82). Today the city is "called "Alasehir" ("city of God")" (Strelan, 82).

Who Speaks

v. 7 "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 holy and true. These are essential attributes of His divinity. He is holy in Himself. Christ speaks truth at all times. He has the "key of David." This key is the symbol of the power of the Kingdom. The "key of the house of David" is mentioned in Isaiah 22:22-25. A proud steward named Shebna is put down from self-glorification. Eliakim is then the steward put in charge "as a faithful official and "father" in the whole kingdom" (Becker, *Revelation*, 67). Eliakim had keys to the royal treasury. In this, Eliakim foreshadows Christ, who holds the key of David (Becker, *Revelation*, 66-67). Christ holds open all the riches of the kingdom of heaven.

What Jesus Knows

v. 8 "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."

Strelan notes that this opened door is "the door of salvation" (Strelan, *Where Earth Meets Heaven: A Commentary*

Prayer: Psalm 27

¹The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom | shall I fear?*

The LORD is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I | be afraid?

²**When evildoers assail me to eat | up my flesh,* my adversaries and foes, it is they who stum- | ble and fall.**

³Though an army encamp against me, my heart | shall not fear;* though war arise against me, yet I will be | confident.

⁴**One thing have I asked of the LORD, that will I seek | after:* that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the LORD and to inquire in his | temple.**

⁵For he will hide me in his shelter in the day of | trouble;* he will conceal me under the cover of his tent; he will lift me high up- | on a rock.

⁶**And now my head shall be lifted up above my enemies all around me, and will offer in his tent sacrifices with | shouts of joy;* I will sing and make melody | to the LORD.**

⁷Hear, O LORD, when I | cry aloud;* be gracious to me and | answer me!

⁸**You have said, | "Seek my face."** My heart says to you, "Your face, LORD, | do I seek."**

⁹Hide not your face from me. Turn not your servant away in | anger,* O you who have been my help. Cast me not off; forsake me not, O God of my sal- | vation!

¹⁰**For my father and my mother have for- | saken me,* but the LORD will | take me in.**

¹¹Teach me your way, | O LORD,* and lead me on a level path because of my | enemies.

¹²**Give me not up to the will of my adver- | saries;* for false witnesses have risen against me, and they breathe out | violence.**

¹³I believe that I shall look upon the goodness | of the LORD* in the land of the | living!

¹⁴**Wait | for the LORD:* be strong, and let your heart take courage; wait | for the LORD! Glory be to the Father and | to the Son* and to the Holy | Spirit; as it was in the be- | ginning,***

on *Revelation*, 83). This 'door of salvation' is Jesus Christ Himself. Through Him, believers have access to God (Ephesians 2:18; Acts 4:12) (Strelan, 83).

Some argue that the opened door is 'the open door to one's heart,' or an open door to mission work in the congregation, because St. Paul uses a similar phrase (1 Corinthians 16:8-9; 2 Corinthians 2:12). Becker refutes this, reminding us of the *context* of this letter - that "the emphasis is not so much on the mission opportunities of the congregation as on the blessings that the Savior will show upon the Christians of Philadelphia out of the storehouses of His grace" (Becker, *Revelation*, 68). Christ has no criticism for the Christians at Philadelphia. This is a letter of divine encouragement in the face of persecution.

Strelan suggests that the persecution may have had another kind of 'open door' behind it - the open doors in the floor of the Roman arena. "Libitina was the Roman goddess of corpses; in her temple were kept the death registers" (Strelan, 83). The *porta Libitina* ('door of death') was the door through which the bodies of dead gladiators were carried (Strelan, 83). The possibility of a violent death plagued the patiently-enduring Philadelphian Christians.

+ In the recent news, there was martyrdom of American Christians at Umpqua Community College in Roseburg, Oregon. Put yourself in the place of those martyrs, in the face of eternity: how could you "patiently endure" and *confess Christ* to a murderer and to the world in that terrible moment?

v. 8b "I know you have but little power"

The Christians have 'but little power.' The opened door to salvation depends on God's initiative and the strength and authority of Christ - not on the Christian's power. The congregation at Philadelphia may have been small in size and influence, but what it was in size, it made up for in the patient endurance in God's Word. They treasured Christ's words and did not deny His name.

+ What does having 'little power' in ourselves force a congregation and individuals to depend on in the life of the Church?

Truth Clash with the Synagogue in Philadelphia

v. 9 "the synagogue of Satan"

Since the letter to the Christians in Smyrna, we have already seen this phrase. There was also a significant number of racial Jews living in Philadelphia. They used their influence to undermine the true Israel, Christ's Church. Thus they are called a synagogue of Satan - precisely because they prevented others from hearing about the open door of salvation in Jesus Christ. In rejecting Christ, the very Messiah of God, they became a synagogue of Satan.

Christ promises that these false Jews will see the truth when they are made to bow before the Lord at His second coming (see Philippians 2:9-11). They will see that Christ has loved His Church.

+ In what sense are the Jews "God's chosen people"? In what sense is Israel "God's chosen nation"? Should we expect Christ to return to Jerusalem? Should Christians try to speak the Gospel to the Jews?

Encouragement for the Hour of Trial

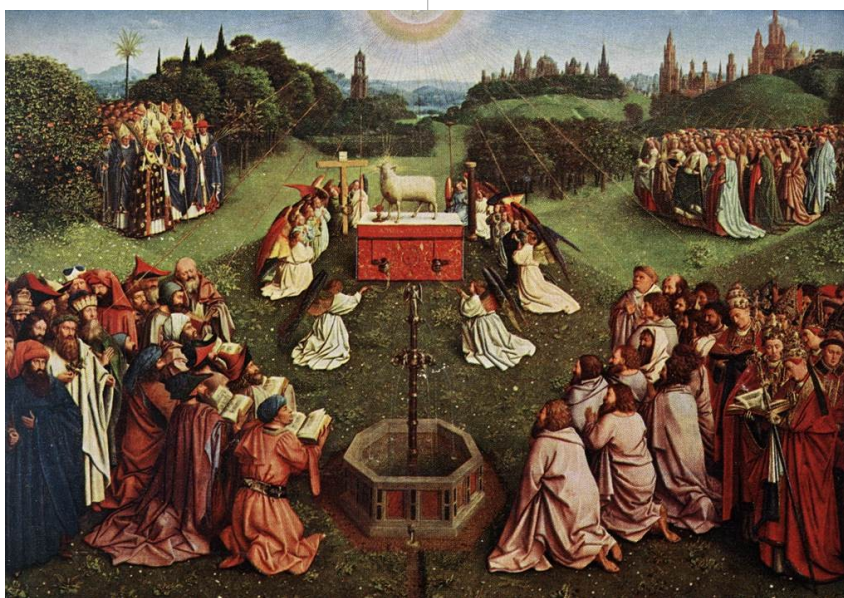
v. 10 "patient endurance"

The patient endurance (*hypomone*) of the Philadelphians is the mark of their faith. Christ will not prevent the trial from coming on them because of their faith, but will help them endure through the hour of trial.

+ Do we ever lose focus in this "patient endurance" in Christ? What are some ways we crave for something that seems *more sure* than the Word of God's Law and Gospel and the sacraments rightly administered? How can Christians remain steadfast in the midst of trials of faith?

v. 11 "I am coming soon."

This is a word of joy to the Christian. It is a fearful and foolish word to those who refuse to repent of their sin. Christ is coming soon indeed.



v. 11b "Hold fast what you have, so that no one may seize your crown."

The Philadelphians have all they need to be ready for the hour of trial. We need nothing more than the Gospel and the Holy Spirit to endure trial. The victor's crown is the crown of life, offered as a gift to the faithful believers by Christ our Lord.

Promises to the Conquerors in Christ

v. 12 "pillar in the temple of my God"

Christ promises that the faithful in the Church will be living pillars who stand steadfast in the time of trial.

v. 12b "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."

God's name ("*Yahweh*") has been written on the Christian in baptism with the new name of Christ. In baptism the name of God - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit - is given to the believer. The Christian belongs to God and is written down in the census of the heavenly Jerusalem - the book of life. Christ's blood covers their sin. His resurrection guarantees eternal life for the Christian. These promises of Christ are strong staring down the face of persecution.

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

The ears are the organs of election. The same ears have been given by the Spirit to these Christians at Philadelphia. The letter ends the same mysterious way as the others.

Hymn: "God's Own Child I Gladly Say It" (LSB 594)

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