

Revelation 3:7-13

The Church of Philadelphia

The Faithful Church – PART 2

Study 14

We come this morning to our second teaching in the letter written to the believers in the church of Philadelphia

- Of all the churches Jesus dictates His letters to
 - The church in Philadelphia stands out as the greatest example of a genuinely healthy church
- With all the churches that Jesus writes to, save Smyrna and Philadelphia,
 - Because of His holiness and desire for purity within the church,
 - Jesus criticizes and correct many things
- As we read each letter, it is obvious, from the Lord position, that sins were overflowing and left unrepentant in many areas
 - And so Jesus comes to these churches to point out their iniquity and calls them to repentance
 - Offering each blessing and grace in return

While Jesus condemns 5 of the 7 churches,

- By stark contrast, Jesus had nothing but praise and promise for the church in Philadelphia
 - But before He lavishes commendation on the church – as He does with each church
 - Jesus introduces Himself to the church beginning in verse 7
 - **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”:
- Something we may not have talked about too much, but you may have picked up on
 - When Jesus introduces Himself to each church, He describes Himself in terms that relate back to the vision of Himself in chapter one
 - Chapter 1: **12** Then I turned to see the voice that spoke with me. And having turned I saw seven golden lampstands, **13** and in the midst of the seven lampstands *One* like the Son of Man, clothed with a garment down to the feet and girded about the chest with a golden band. **14** His head and hair *were* white like wool, as white as snow, and His eyes like a

flame of fire; **15** His feet *were* like fine brass, as if refined in a furnace, and His voice as the sound of many waters; **16** He had in His right hand seven stars, out of His mouth went a sharp two-edged sword, and His countenance *was* like the sun shining in its strength. **17** And when I saw Him, I fell at His feet as dead. But He laid His right hand on me, saying to me,[h] “Do not be afraid; I am the First and the Last. **18** I *am* He who lives, and was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore. Amen. And I have the keys of Hades and of Death.

- So far, in each letter to the churches, we see one or more of these titles given to Jesus as He introduces Himself
 - In Ephesus, He describes Himself as the “He who holds the seven stars in His right hand, who walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands”
 - In Smyrna, as the First and the Last
 - In Pergamos, He who has the sharp two-edged sword
 - In Thyatira, “He who has eyes like a flame of fire, and His feet like fine brass”
 - Sardis – “He who has the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars”
- So far, in each letter we see a description of Jesus taken from His opening revelation of Who He is to John from chapter 1
 - Except here in Philadelphia.
 - Jesus describes Himself as holy and true and having the keys of David
 - None of which are found in His inaugural introduction

And in some way, that speaks deeply to me.

- It tells me that Jesus is so transcendent, so uniquely eternally holy and mysterious
 - With such true eternal characteristics,
 - That there would not be volume enough to describe His majesty
- Even the beautiful description John gives us in his initial vision of Jesus
 - Isn’t a complete description, because it can’t be a complete description
 - Jesus is so marvelous and so matchless,
 - human language is not robust enough to bring a full descriptive understanding

- Job 36:26 “Behold, God *is* great, and we do not know *Him*; Nor can the number of His years *be* discovered.

The letter continues in verse 8 “I know your works. See, I have set before you an open door, and no one can shut it;[d] 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.

- The Philadelphian Christians were models of Christianity – at least according to the testimony of Jesus
 - They were strong in the foundational elements – strong in faith, kept God’s word and kept their testimony
- And God promised to honor that with a promise that their enemies would one day
 - Find themselves before the feet of those they persecuted

And this promise – that the enemies would one day worship at feet of those they persecuted

- This is the first of many promises Jesus would give this church
 - And this morning we will be looking at the remaining promises this letter holds
- I see a total of four (4)
 - The first one we covered last week and just reviewed –
 - Promise 1 – That one day God will honor us before our enemies
- The 2nd Promise(The Keeping) is found in verse 10 and it is a very in-depth subject
 - **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.
 - This is a verse that needs much consideration, as the implications are quite amazing

There is much with this verse, but we don’t want to miss the basic obvious premise of the promise:

- That is because the Philadelphians kept Jesus’ command to persevere,
 - Jesus promised He would keep them from an hour of trial coming upon the world

- This is a promise of protection – specifically a promise of protection from God’s judgment on the world
 - And it is by the will of the Lord and according to His grace
 - that these Christians would be protected
 - That, in and of itself, is a wonderful promise
- I think many commentators jump right into the thick of this verse
 - and unwittingly become remiss in pointing out the very basic, but very powerful, love God demonstrates for His people

The Bible gives many illustrations of God’s protection for His people in **two primary ways**

- First, protection *in the midst of God’s judgment* against a people
 - And secondly, God’s demonstrates His deliverance by *removing His people from the impending judgment* (before the judgment came)
 - He keeps us through His judgment of the world, AND He keeps us out of the judgment coming on the world

Some illustrations of being kept through:

- We think of Noah and his family who were provided a way of escape by God’s hand
 - Given the grace of protection in the midst of the trials that were coming upon the world
 - Right? The world was being judged. God’s wrath was being poured out on the entire world
 - Yet Noah and his family were protected while in the Ark *while* God’s wrath was being poured out on the world
 - They were being protected through the judgment
 - Remember, also, the provision of the lamb’s blood on the doorpost of God’s people as a protection from the Angel of Death
 - The angel passed over the homes with the blood
 - Again, this was protection through, or in the midst of, God’s judgments
 - There are also illustrations throughout the Bible of God’s protection and deliverance
 - by removing His people out of the impending judgment
 - Being taken out before the judgments came down
 - Think of Enoch who was taken out, caught up or translated, before the judgment of God came down

- How about Lot and his family. God didn't preserve them through the judgment
 - He removed them completely before hand.
 - Interestingly, God said to Lot “**22** Hurry, escape there. For I cannot do anything until you arrive there.”
- There are many more in scripture to show how God keeps His people from the wrath to come by taking them out before it comes
 - The point I'm making here, is that God's promises are sweet to His children
 - And whether He protects in the midst, or protects by removal,
 - His protections are a reminder of His love for His people.
 - And that is something we cannot forget in the middle of this passage.

With the basic covered, let me begin unpacking this verse by saying this:

- Verse 10 is probably the most hotly contested verse between what are known as pretribulationists and non-pretribulationist.
 - Very briefly, just to give definitions:
 - A pre-tribulationist is a Christian who believes that Jesus will come before the 7-year tribulation period (which the book of Revelation is all about)
 - To take the Christians out of the world before His wrath is poured out
 - This is known as the rapture of the church. A doctrine found in 1 Thes. 4:16-18
- Those that believe in the pretribulation rapture of the church believe that Jesus will come and take His church to Himself in the clouds
 - And then, at the end of the tribulation, we will come back with Jesus as He brings an end to all evil

A non-pretribulationist would be a Christians who does not believe in the pre-trib view.

- There are a number of view points, but the three most prevelant are the pre-trib
 - The post-tribulation view, and the mid-tribulation view
 - The post-trib view believes that Christians will go through the tribulation period

- And then God will either rapture the church on the last day and turn right back around with them and judge the earth
 - Or they don't believe in the rapture at all
- (mid-trib) Those that believe that the rapture of the church will happen somewhere in the middle of the tribulation – before what they consider to be “great tribulation period”
 - these are called mid-tribers.
 - So, we have the pre-trib: rapture of the church before the 7 year trib period
 - The mid-trib: rapture of the church at the 3.5 mark
 - And the post trib: if there is a rapture, it'll happen at the end of the 7 year tribulation period

Ok. Why is this even important as we study this letter and specifically verse 10? Why do I start with these view points and their definitions?

- For two important reasons:
 - First, because no matter what view is held, each believe that Jesus is coming back again
 - those that hold their specific view **ARE CHRISTIANS!**
 - I think well-meaning Christians, in their passion and convictions, can forget this in our discussions on the topic.
 - Have the debates, have the conversations
 - But have a modicum of humility and love for one another

The other reason I start with these definitions is because this verse stretches beyond the immediate context of the Philadelphian church

- And has prophetic implications for the church at large
 - Remember, these letters are to “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches”
 - And so it's not only for you and me, but also for those who come after (should the Lord tarry)

The debate that surrounds this verse rests implicitly on what Jesus meant when He said

- “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.”

- The pre-trib view is that when Jesus said He would keep us from the hour,
 - That He is speaking of the removal, and therefore the rapture, of the church before the 7-year tribulation period
- The mid-trib and the post-trib view is that Jesus when Jesus said He would keep us from
 - What He means is that He will preserve us through the tribulation period.
 - And then coming to get us either half way through or at the end

To help us understand what equally sincere and devout students of prophetic scripture differ on

- I will break this verse down into 4 parts to give it a bit more ease in the brain space
 - First- I will keep you from (protection from or preserving through the trial)
 - Second – The hour of trial (period of time of the trial)
 - Third – which shall come upon the whole world (scope of the trial)
 - Lastly – to test those who dwell on the earth (purpose of the trial)

First, “Protection from or Preserving through”

- Jesus said “I will keep you from”...the hour of trial
 - The discussion polarizes around the phrase “keep you from”
 - and whether what’s intended by the author is to keep the church out of the trial or preserve it through it
 - The phrase in Greek is <tereo ek>
 - <Tereo> meaning to keep and <ek> meaning “from”
- Tereo, meaning keep, is better translated “preserve” or “protect”;
 - Especially in context since great trials are in view in the hour of testing

The controversy surrounds the word <ek> which is used throughout Scripture as ‘out of’ as well as ‘through’ depending on context of the passage

- And so some take this protection or preserving as an immunity from the trials while going through
 - While others will see this as protection by being removed out of trials.

- Kind of the Miagi approach: “Best way to block punch; is no be there”
 - God’s people will not be there when the punch of God’s wrath is unleashed

In my study of both the post tribulation view, as well as the pre, I am convinced that the more accurate rendering here is “out of”

- That when Jesus says He will keep us from, He is specifically saying He will keep us out of the trials
 - Accomplishing this by removing the church before
- Now, this subject matter goes far deeper than we can handle this morning and far smarter people than me have gone in-depth on this word
 - So I will hang my convictions on their research
 - But let me bring a few points to light on this word <ek>
- First, Greek scholars agree that more natural sense of the preposition is removal.
 - The natural rendering is “out of”
 - Also, if the Lord would want to communicate an immunity through the tribulation
 - Better Greek words would have solidified the point.
 - Words such as EN or Para would have communicated that without controversy

Lastly, on this point of keeping from, if what is meant is a keeping from within – a protection or immunity from within - as proponents of the post-tribulation view hold

- Then their appears to be a contradiction
 - since clearly, there are those who will become believers during the tribulation who will suffer the same temporal fate as unbelievers.
 - Thus, many believers will not be kept safe.
- To be kept safe or protected within the tribulation does not really mean to be kept safe
 - because many who come to faith in Christ during the tribulation will suffer the temporal fate of unbelievers. (6:9-11; 7:9-14; 13:7)
 - So I would conclude that when Jesus said He would keep us from,
 - that what is being communicated is that He will keep us out of the trials

The second part, as we continue to break down this verse, is the period of time of the trial

- I will keep you... “from the hour of trial”
 - Many misunderstand this portion by focusing their attention on the trial and not the time period
 - We are promised to be kept, not from the trial, but from the hour of the trial
- See, the church will not even experience the trial for it will be *kept from the hour* when the trial is visited upon the earth
 - As Showers said “Christ promised to keep these church saints form the *time period* characterized by the testing Christ had in mind. If the Lord had meant that He would keep them from just the testing itself, He could have made that very clear by omitting the words ‘the hour’ and simply saying, ‘I will keep you from the testing.’”
 - When the all-important word *hour* is factored into the discussion, it becomes clear that the promise relates to the *time* of trial and not its effects

What I find baffling, is that every translation that I read omitted a very specific word in from the Greek text here

- But it is a very important word, because without it the view is general and not specific
 - What am I talking about? It’s the word “the”.
- As Greek scholars point out, the text actually reads: “I will also keep you from **the** hour of **THE** trial”
 - Why is that important?
 - Because in Greek, when the definite article is used before a word
 - It specifies or identifies something
 - Not like the English where it doesn’t hold too much significance
 - In Greek it is very important
- And so in our text, the writer is communicating that He will keep us from a specific time frame of a specific trial (the word trail is testing or temptation)
 - But the emphasis here that we want to remember is that Jesus will keep us from the hour itself
 - We will be kept out of the time of the trial – not just the testing itself

And that brings us to our third part in our breaking down of this verse

- The first- I will keep you from – speaking of a protection from
 - The second – The hour of trial; again speaking of being kept out of the time period of the testing itself
 - And thirdly, **the scope of the trial**. “which shall come upon the whole earth”

This trial, this testing that Jesus is telling the church about, is future.

- Meaning that it didn’t happen before the letters written, but it’s prophetic. To the Philadelphian church, it was still coming
 - And I believe it’s still coming for us as well. Why? – Specifically because of the scope
 - This isn’t a local issue. It’s to come upon the entire earth
- One interesting notion we get from the original language that is not immediately obvious in English
 - Is that the participle “which shall come” modifies the noun “hour”, rather than the “trial”
 - Giving prominence to the hour that is coming upon the whole world
- But the point here is that this hour of trial is coming upon the whole earth
 - And what cataclysmic trial has come upon the entire globe – akin to that of the flood
 - As in the days of Noah
 - It’s that kind of widespread “world” that’s referenced here
 - What global trial have we experienced from the hand of God since the writing of these letters?
 - None!
- This is why we conclude that what is spoken of here is the coming 7 year tribulation period
 - In which this book reveals

The last part in breaking down this verse is in the last phrase of verse 10

- And **it gives us the purpose**. The reason behind these trials
 - “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.”
- The reason this global tribulation is coming is not for the church.
 - It’s not to purify the believers
 - It’s to test those who dwell on the earth!

- Who are these people? Who are the earth dwellers?

The book of Revelation describes those who dwell on the earth as unbelievers. Every time.

- Turn with me to Rev 6:10
 - “And they cried with a loud voice [these are the martyrs during the tribulation period], saying, “How long, O Lord, holy and true, until You judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?
 - Rev. 8:13 “And I looked, and I heard an angel[b] flying through the midst of heaven, saying with a loud voice, “Woe, woe, woe to the inhabitants of the earth, because of the remaining blasts of the trumpet of the three angels who are about to sound!”
 - Speaking of the two witnesses, Rev 11: **10** And those who dwell on the earth will rejoice over them, make merry, and send gifts to one another, because these two prophets tormented those who dwell on the earth.”
- Speaking of the beast, Rev 13:6 Then he opened his mouth in blasphemy against God, to blaspheme His name, His tabernacle, and those who dwell in heaven. **7** It was granted to him to make war with the saints and to overcome them. And authority was given him over every tribe,[d] tongue, and nation. **8** All who dwell on the earth will worship him, whose names have not been written in the Book of Life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.”
 - Verse **12** And he exercises all the authority of the first beast in his presence, and causes the earth and those who dwell in it to worship the first beast, whose deadly wound was healed.
 - Verse **14** And he deceives those[e] who dwell on the earth by those signs which he was granted to do in the sight of the beast, telling those who dwell on the earth to make an image to the beast who was wounded by the sword and lived.
 - 17:8 “The beast that you saw was, and is not, and will ascend out of the bottomless pit and go to perdition. And those who dwell on the earth will marvel, whose names are not written in the Book of Life from the foundation of the world, when they see the beast that was, and is not, and yet is”
 - It’s plain that those who dwell on the earth are unbelievers; they are unregenerate
 - And worship the beast and not Jesus

- Their names are not written in the Book of Life from the foundation of the world

Some may ask at this point, well if all those who dwell on the earth during the tribulation are unbelievers

- Does that mean that there are no believers at all?
 - No it does not.
 - The phrase “those who dwell on the earth” is used to signify a party of people
 - It is a category – for lack of better words
- But there will also be Gentile believers and Jewish believers
 - The Jewish believers are in a category all their own and we will study that when we get there
 - But the Bible talks about other people coming to know Jesus as their savior during the tribulation period
 - They are categorized as martyrs, because they will all be killed

Which is a real problem for a post tribulational view that says that God will protect Christians **through** the tribulation

- Because God’s word says that Christians in the tribulation will all be killed
 - I don’t have time to go through all the scriptures this morning
 - But let me give you just a couple from chapter 13
 - Verse 7 “It was granted to him to make war with the saints and to overcome them. And authority was given him over every tribe, tongue, and nation.”
 - Verse 15 “He was granted *power* to give breath to the image of the beast, that the image of the beast should both speak and cause as many as would not worship the image of the beast to be killed.”

Back to Rev 3:10. The purpose of this testing on the entire earth is not for Christians

- It is to judge unbelievers
 - And the church is promised to be removed before the tribulation begins
- And that’s what we are talking about this morning – the promises of God given in His letter to the church in Philadelphia

- The first promise from verse 9 is that Jesus will honor you before your accusers and persecutors
 - The second promise – which we just went in-depth about
 - Is that Jesus promises to keep Christians out of the hour of tribulation that will come on the entire earth
 - Because it's a time set aside to test or judge the unbelievers who are categorized as "those who dwell on the earth"
- This is an incredible verse and an incredible promise to you and to me
 - If you and I live when Jesus comes to catch His church up unto Himself
 - We will not be going through the horrendous and frightening judgments that we will be reading about in chapters 4-20 here in the book of Revelation
 - We as believers are going to be removed! We are out of here.
 - We will not be here during the tribulation period!
- And we should rejoice in this promise!
 - But also keep in mind, there are others that do not agree.
 - And they are just as precious and just as loved by God as all His children are
 - Pre, Post, Mid, Pan...whatever is not a dividing line in Christendom.
- Of course I am fully convinced, many scholars and far smarter people than I don't agree with my view
 - So I hold this doctrine with humble conviction and I think we all should
 - And if I'm wrong, if we are wrong...
 - As the great Dr. David Hocking says "then I'll change my view" 😊

This is the second promise we read here in the letter to Philadelphia.

- **First promise:** Honored before our enemies
- **Second:** we will be kept from the judgment coming upon the whole world. A removal before wrath
- Let's finish with the last promises and conclude our time in this letter
 - **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.”

The last two promises

- Verse 12 “I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God”
 - And the later half of 12, “I will write on him the name of My God and the name of the city of My God...and I will write on him My new name”
- Philadelphia was a city notorious for its earthquakes.
 - In 17AD Philadelphia was completely destroyed by an earthquake, along with Sardis and other cities in the same area.
 - Most of the other cities recovered quickly from the disaster but the aftershocks continued for a number of years in Philadelphia.
 - The people were constantly having to flee the city in order to avoid being crushed by falling masonry from their houses.
 - And so it’s against this physical backdrop Jesus said to His church I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he shall go out no more.
- A pillar is a symbol of strength and permanence.
 - And so it seems that our Lord is promising those who hold on to what they have, a position in the life to come of strength and permanence; they will be someone who upholds things.
 - In Galatians 2:9, the Apostle Paul refers to Peter, James and John as "pillars" of the church;
 - the church rested upon them in some sense as they were imparting guidance and knowledge to Christians.
 - This promise of Jesus to never go out again is a reference to the experience of these Philadelphians who had frequently to flee the city because of the earthquake tremors that came.
 - When you labor for me, says Jesus, you will reach a place where you will not have to go out ever again.
 - This seems to be a picture of security, permanence and strength.

The last promise of being marked by an eternal permanent marker

- And written on us in some fashion will be a tri-une name package –
 - the name of God, the new name of Jesus and the name of the new Jerusalem
 - Some toy with the idea that this sounds like a tattoo
 - I don't know and really it's speculation
- But what we know for sure is that God will mark us, we will be easily identified as His
 - And will have access to the New Jerusalem
 - *Rev. 22:3-4 - "3 And there shall be no more curse, but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and His servants shall serve Him. 4 They shall see His face, and His name shall be on their foreheads."*
 -