

SESSION 6

Faithful in All Things



QUESTION 1:

When has a word of encouragement been especially timely?

THE POINT

Faithfully trust God as you minister to others.

THE PASSAGE

Revelation 3:7-13

THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

Several years ago I served alongside a pastor who wrote five to ten notes of encouragement every Monday. He sent these notes to different people in the church. At the time I didn't really understand the importance of what he was doing. Why spend so much time doing something that seemed so tedious and time consuming each week? Looking back, that pastor knew something I hadn't yet learned as a young pastor: encouragement goes a long way in helping the people in your sphere of influence to keep walking strong in their own faith. Even when we don't know what's going on in a person's life, a simple word of encouragement is never out of place.

We all love words of encouragement. Even simple statements like “good job” and “keep up the good work” can really lift our spirits and motivate us to do our best. Words of encouragement keep us moving forward in the right direction—and what could possibly be greater than a word of encouragement from Jesus Himself? The church at Philadelphia received just such a word—a word that can encourage our own walk with Christ.

Revelation 3:7-8

7 “Write to the angel of the church in Philadelphia: Thus says the Holy One, the true one, the one who has the key of David, who opens and no one will close, and who closes and no one opens:

8 I know your works. Look, I have placed before you an open door that no one can close because you have but little power; yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name.

Jesus’ sixth message was to the church in Philadelphia, a name that means “brotherly love.” It was the “youngest” of the seven cities in Revelation 2–3, but it was a place of rich soil and vineyards (which might explain why they worshiped Dionysus, the Greek god of wine).

To this church, Jesus identified Himself by several titles; “the Holy One, the true one, the one who has the key of David, who opens and no one will close, and who closes and no one opens.” His reference to *the key of David* hearkens back to Isaiah 22:22, Isaiah’s prophecy about Eliakim. Eliakim had been put into place as the palace secretary, and the key referred to the fact that Eliakim could literally open or close any door he wanted because of his high position in the court of David. When we read this in light of Christ, we see that Jesus, who is the root and offspring of David, has the absolute authority. He alone has the authority to let people into the heavenly city and before His throne. Not only does Christ have the authority to open the door, He is the door. The salvation He made possible is the only way into the presence of God.

This door was open before the believers in Philadelphia, and no one could close it! The door of salvation—the door that gained them entrance into eternity and the presence of God—was wide open. It was not open to the church because of any great ability or

strength they had; in fact, Jesus noted the church had little power. Power was not the issue; faith and trust were—and that’s what the church in Philadelphia had. Their faith was evident in two ways:

1. **They kept His word.** They remained true to what they had learned and received. They had not allowed any distractions or the sinful culture around them to take them off course from their trust and obedience.
2. **They did not deny the name of Jesus.** No matter what trials or persecution they faced, the believers refused to dishonor or deny the name of the One who saved them.

This is such an important message for us today as well. When we trust His Word to us and place our unwavering faith in the name of Jesus, the door of His salvation is open to us. Any power we may try to muster is insufficient and unnecessary; we need only trust Christ.

Philadelphia

COMMENDED FOR:

1. ENDURING WITH LIMITED STRENGTH
2. KEEPING CHRIST’S WORD
3. REMAINING FAITHFUL TO THE NAME OF CHRIST

QUESTION 2:

When have you been invited to take advantage of a unique opportunity?

Revelation 3:9-10

9 Note this: I will make those from the synagogue of Satan, who claim to be Jews and are not, but are lying—I will make them come and bow down at your feet, and they will know that I have loved you.

10 Because you have kept my command to endure, I will also keep you from the hour of testing that is going to come on the whole world to test those who live on the earth.

KEY WORDS: Synagogue of Satan (v. 9)—Like the Jewish faction that harassed the believers in Smyrna (Rev. 2:9), these Jews rejected Jesus and persecuted His followers in Philadelphia.

I remember in school when our teachers told us to pay attention and take note of something they were about to tell us. That indicated it was going to be on an upcoming test or it was something that would impact everything else we studied. If it was important enough for me to pay attention when a teacher said, “Take note,” it is especially important when Jesus tells us to “Note this.”

Jesus wanted the church in Philadelphia to take note of what would happen to the Jews. He spoke of those who opposed the church’s witness as “the synagogue of Satan.” They claimed to be Jews but were just living a lie. During His earthly ministry, Jesus told a group of Jews that if they were Abraham’s offspring, they would do what Abraham did (John 8:39). The apostle Paul also wrote, “And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s seed, heirs according to the promise” (Gal. 3:29). The Jews in Philadelphia rejected the truth of Christ and, therefore, were not true Jews. Because they had rejected Christ and His followers, they would one day bow before Him and acknowledge the truth of who Christ is and His love for the church.

Whatever oppositions these false Jews threw at them, the believers prevailed. They endured. No matter how hard it had been, no matter what obstacles were thrown in front of them, they had remained strong in their relationship with Christ.

As a result of their faithfulness, Jesus promised them the protection only he could bring. “I will also keep you from the hour of testing that is going to come on the whole world to test those who live on the earth.” While many scholars see this as a reference to a time of great tribulation, they debate the meaning of *keep you*

DIGGING DEEPER

THE GREAT TRIBULATION

Christians are told in the Bible to anticipate tribulation in the world. “In this world you will have trouble” (John 16:33). The words of Jesus in Matthew 24:21-22 speak of a tribulation in the last days that will surpass any that the world has ever experienced and promises that there will never be another like it. Some interpreters understand the words of the promise to the church at Philadelphia as a reference to this great tribulation of which Jesus spoke.

Is this a promise that believers will be removed from the world prior to the great tribulation or a promise that believers, while enduring the tribulation, will be kept miraculously by God from the most serious effects of that tribulation? The basic question relates to the verb *tereō*, having the sense of “keep,” and

the preposition *ek*, meaning “out of” or “from.” Pretribulationists, who believe the church will be taken from the world prior to the outbreak of the great tribulation and will return with Christ seven years later as a part of his millennial kingdom maintain that to “keep you from the hour of trial that is going to come upon the whole world” is a promise that the church will not be present for the tribulation. Posttribulationists believe the church will have to go through the tribulation but the church will be in, but not the object of, the great tribulation. Commentators supporting the theory that the church remains in the world for the tribulation have sought to argue on the basis of the grammar that nothing is said here about taking the church out of the world. All that is said is that Christians will be “kept from” the hour of trial.

Paige Patterson, *Revelation*, vol. 39 in New American Commentary (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2012) Wordsearch ed.

from. Many believe this means Christ will remove His followers from the time of tribulation, and others believe this means God will protect His children from experiencing the wrath that comes during the time of tribulation. The main thing is that Christ promises protection for those who endure.

A “trust fall” is an exercise in which a blindfolded person leans backward until he falls, but he is falling backwards into the arms of those whom he trusts to catch him. He might struggle with the decision to let go and trust those he cannot see. With Christ, we can trust Him completely. If we are followers of Christ who remain true to His Word, we have no need to worry about the future. God will always “catch” us. Just as He promised the believers in Philadelphia, we also can trust His protection. He will see us through to the end.

QUESTION 3:

What are some things we can do to obey Jesus’ command to endure?

Revelation 3:11-13

11 I am coming soon. Hold on to what you have, so that no one takes your crown.

12 The one who conquers I will make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he will never go out again. 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 my new name.

13 Let anyone who has ears to hear listen to what the Spirit says to the churches.”

Difficulties and tribulations may come, but Jesus promised, “I am coming soon.” From our twenty-first century perspective,

one might be tempted to think Jesus did not keep His promise, but that's not the case. From the perspective of eternity, Christ's return is soon!

As it was meant to be a comfort to the Philadelphian believers, Christ's promise should comfort us too. For that reason, Jesus calls all believers to "hold on to what you have" because the challenges we face in the Christian life will soon be over. We should be living with the expectancy that He could return at any time. No matter what we face, no matter how uncertain the days are ahead for us, we can rest assured that Christ is coming again. When He comes, we—His people—will be ultimately delivered from any and all trials, persecutions, and difficulties.

QUESTION 4:

How can we help each other hold on to all that we have in Christ?

To the one who finishes the race, Christ will make the victor "a pillar in the temple of my God." Here was a promise of security in the presence of God, and it might have been especially meaningful to this church. Philadelphia had experienced a devastating earthquake in AD 17, and the inhabitants continued to feel tremors for years. Even today, the only thing that remains from some of the ancient temples are the massive pillars, but here is a promise that, in Christ, we are secure and unmovable in God's eternal presence.

Many pillars in the ancient temples had names inscribed on them of special people who were prominent either in the temple or in the city. We do something similar today when we affix people's names on buildings. Yet Christ "will write on him the name of my God and the name of the city of my God." Christ will mark those who belong to Him, identifying who they are and that they are His. This was extremely significant to those in the church at Philadelphia. They had been pretty much outcasts in the city, but Christ promised they would be recognized as worthy in His kingdom.

The city of Philadelphia went through many name changes in its history, and the people of God cherished the idea that God Himself chose to identify with them and assure them of a new name and a permanent citizenship in heaven. We have that same opportunity. No matter what we face in life, as a child of God who belongs to Him, Christ assures us we have been given a new name and citizenship in His kingdom. We too must continue to hold on to the truth. We are living in uncertain times, but the promises of God and the provisions from God are just as real today as they were for the church in Philadelphia.

QUESTION 5:

What are some ways our church is like the church at Philadelphia?

ENGAGE

What keeps you from trusting God, especially during times of trials?

What is one step you can take today to trust God more?

How can you guard yourself from people who attempt to deceive you?

LIVE IT OUT

What are some ways our church is like the church at Philadelphia?

- ▶ **Endure.** Identify times or areas of your life when enduring in your faith have been hardest. Pray for Christ's power to stand strong. Let the reminder that He is coming soon to set you free from your difficulties serve as a motivation to stand with Him.
- ▶ **Encourage.** As you see others standing and enduring in their faith, commend them for their faithfulness. Encourage them to continue being a faithful witness.
- ▶ **Invite.** Invite others to walk through “the open door” of salvation and enter into eternity with Christ. Be faithful in your witness of Christ's salvation.

