



KIAMA ANGLICAN
CHURCHES

Philadelphia:
Persevering Pillars

Revelation 3:7-13

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Sermon - 21 June 2020

Revelation 3:7-13

Philadelphia “adelphos-phila: Brotherly Love”

Displaying the faithful contrast of Strength in Weakness....

Just like the church of Smyrna, there is a contrast immediately between *strength and weakness*. Smyrna, the second Revelation Church was strong in endurance and holding to the eternal promises of faith in God. Philadelphia the sixth Church is seemingly a weak church and yet the Bible implies this is their virtue. It is a virtue because it brings a humility of spirit. This is meekness, a gentleness. The temptation of strength is to rely on ourselves and not the Lord. What an apt test for each of us through the COVID19 time? You may be financially, academically, musically or artistically strong. Strength may not be the problem. Looking for strength in the wrong places is the problem. Today's passage from Revelation will open up this dichotomy of strength and weakness.

It is clear from this letter that the Church of Philadelphia is *faithful*. Where the other churches have been encouraged to get on with good deeds, we don't hear any rebuke from this church. It seems Philadelphia is witnessing, loving, keeping good watch on their life and doctrine. These things are pointed out as failings of the other churches but they are not mentioned here. We presume instead that the Church of Philadelphia are living faithfully. This little church of Philadelphia had little strength, yet it was holding onto the Word of God in the name of Jesus. It was a faithful, patient little church. Most of the letter to Philadelphia is not taken up with a description of the church. Rather, with words of

comfort and encouragement. Emphasis is on sustained promise and hope.

There are six promises to this little church of Philadelphia.

**1) Jesus promises an open door that no one can shut.
(Verses 7-8)**

We read... “These are the words of him who is holy and true, who holds the key of David. What he opens no one can shut, and what he shuts no one can open. I know your deeds. See, I have placed before you an open door that no one can shut. I know that you have little strength, yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name.”
(Rev. 3:7-8).

This open door symbolises the entrance into the kingdom of God. Jesus is described as having the key of David. This is a reference to Isaiah 22:22, “I will place on his shoulder the key to the house of David. What he opens no-one can shut and what he shuts, no-one can open.” This is the same language as we read in Revelation. Jesus has the key for the entrance to eternal life. In Isaiah, the key gives entrance to the King’s palace and so, entrance to be in the presence of the King. Similarly, the key of David is a symbol of entry into the heavenly palace and so, entrance to the presence of the Heavenly King. This is an open door to Philadelphia that no-one else can shut.

It is an interesting moment to contemplate the perception of the closing of Church doors. Now as the doors reopen at KAC, we can ask, what has God been doing within these closed and reopening doors? God does not seek to limit our hope through weakness in the endurance of our faith. God may not seem to strengthen our confidence in the promises of

God's eternal victory. Jesus has always opened the door of salvation. No-one else is strong enough to close that door. Not even you! Sometimes we believe our sin is so great no-one could forgive us yet our guilt or our shame cannot close the door that Jesus opens. That is God's answer for us through this time!

(Why not pause a moment and quietly confess anything before God that is holding you back within. Forgiveness in Christ opens the eternal door for evermore!)

2) Jesus promises that the false Jews will fall at their feet. (Verse 9)

It says... "I will make those who are of the synagogue of Satan, who claim to be Jews though they are not, but are liars—I will make them come and fall down at your feet and acknowledge that I have loved you."

Just as was the problem in Smyrna. There were Jewish people banding together with the Roman authorities to persecute Christians. The reference that these Jews will "fall down at their feet" is also a reference from Isaiah chapter 45, verse 14: *This is what the LORD says: "The products of Egypt and the merchandise of Cush, and those tall Sabeans—they will come over to you and will be yours; they will trudge behind you, coming over to you in chains. They will bow down before you and plead with you, saying, 'Surely God is with you, and there is no other; there is no other god.'"*

This is the prophecy made to Israel 700 years earlier. Although Israel was oppressed, one day these enemies of God would come and bow down before them. They would recognise that the Israelites know the true God. They would recognise that God is with the Israelites. Jesus is now

applying this prophetic promise to the church in Philadelphia. God's true people are the followers of Jesus. They will be vindicated. There will be a day when all people will come to a reckoning with God. Be encouraged! There is suffering and persecution and fear, but there is vindication. The strength of the eternal promises is in God. We must choose to stand for Christ, even when we are afraid. Our weakness in the face of endurance is the vindication of victory. We must never live for the attention of this world, rather that God would say, "Well done good and faithful servant."

3) Jesus promises to keep them from the hour of trial. (Verse 10)

As it says... "Since you have kept my command to endure patiently, I will also keep you from the hour of trial that is going to come on the whole world to test the inhabitants of the earth."

This final hour of trial could be a final, intense tribulation. It is more likely a moment of testing on the church in the Roman world. Jesus promises to protect us from the Devil and sin. John 17:15 says, *"My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one."*

(Come to the 24 Hours of Prayer next weekend. With your heart, mind and time for the hour of God's trial being faithful in prayer!)

We are not protected from suffering in this world. Yet we are protected from the Devil's final victory over us. By God's grace, he will overcome!

4) Jesus promises to keep them to the end. (Verse 11)

“I am coming soon. Hold on to what you have, so that no one will take your crown.”

The crown is what is given to those who overcome and receive their final salvation. While your identity now might be small, your ultimate identity is to be with the might of Jesus in heaven; never wavering...in Philadelphia, Kiama or Minnamurra.

5) Jesus promises to make them a pillar in the temple of God. (Verse 12)

“The one who is victorious I will make a pillar in the temple of my God. Never again will they leave it.”

Jesus has been depicted as the door keeper to open the door to eternity. The faithful are now described as pillars in this temple. These Christians in Philadelphia feel weak and small and insignificant. Some of us feel this way. Do you ever look back on your life? I thought I would have achieved so much more. My life hasn't worked out as I thought it would. I live with hurts, damage, fears, doubts and troubles. We can feel weakened.

We find out in God's Word that the promise comes to us in this place. *“You will be pillars.”* You will be strong and sturdy in the temple of God. God is reminding us who we really are in Christ. Our identity is in Christ. Our maturity is found in him through the enduring hope fulfilled in God's eternal promise.

6) Jesus promises a threefold name to seal their identity as God's people. (Verse 12)

Found in these words... *"I will write on them the **name of my God** and the **name of the city of my God**, the new Jerusalem, which is coming down out of heaven from my God; and I will also write on them **my new name**."*

The Church of Philadelphia may be small and insignificant but God says you are **mine, mine, mine**. So in conclusion, do not neglect the day of small things. Zechariah reminds us of this heart for God. Take a look especially at Zechariah 4:6-10. At this time the Israelites have a massive undertaking to rebuild the temple. The promise comes - you will rejoice when you see Zerubbabel square off the temple and it is done. Squaring off the temple took days and months and years and decades and lifetimes of small things. God's promise was fulfilled through strength in faithfulness and hope built through weakness beyond the endurance of worldly hope.

We must embrace thousands of days of small things. We can vastly overestimate what we can do for God in five years. Yet we can grossly underestimate what we can do for God in 50 years. Long obedience, day after day, a lifetime of faithfulness. Learn the lesson from the Philadelphians. Each little step matters. Weakness endured in hope. Strength holding onto the eternal promises. Though you may have little strength, keep the Word of God, do not deny the name of Jesus, be patient. God will give the crown of life to the faithful.

Prayer concluding the sermon based on (Verse 13) "Lord Let our ears hear so that our heart might be moved. That our eyes might be opened to act upon our lives faithfully. That

our minds might grapple in the victory of Christ. Over the endurance of our weakness. Overcoming our faithful strength in claiming God's eternal promises. Amen!



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