

FBC POWELL, 9-8-19 AM NOTES
"The Faithful Risk-Taking Church"
Revelation 3:7-13
6 in Series, "Letters from Jesus"

Today we stand on the strong shoulders of the risk takers, the visionaries who came before us.

I. The Speaker (v. 7)

A. He Is Holy (v. 7a)

John 6:69 (NASB) "We have believed and have come to know that You are the Holy One of God."

1 Peter 1:15 (NASB) "But like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all *your* behavior."

B. He Is True (v. 7b)

C. He Is Sovereign (v. 7c)

Revelation 1:18b (NASB) "...I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of death and of Hades."

John 14:6 (NASB) "Jesus said to him, 'I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me.'"

II. The Strengths (v. 8)

2 Corinthians 2:12 (NIV) "Now when I went to Troas to preach the gospel of Christ and found that the Lord had opened a door for me."

Revelation 3:8 (NIV) "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."

2 Corinthians 12:10 (NIV) "That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong."

This church at Philadelphia was commended because as they walked through the open doors, they kept God's Word, and they refused to deny His name.

III. Their Suffering (vv. 9-11)

A. Their Enemies (v. 9)

B. Their Assurance (vv. 10-11)

Matthew 24:21 (NASB) “For then there will be a great tribulation, such as has not occurred since the beginning of the world until now, nor ever will.”

2 John 1:8 (NASB) “Watch yourselves, that you do not lose what we have accomplished, but that you may receive a full reward.”

C. Their Confidence (vv. 12-13)

1. Honor (v. 12a)
2. Ownership (v. 12b)
3. Fellowship (v. 12c)

Conclusion (v. 13)

Chapter

Sermon 6: The Faithful Risk-Taking Church

Revelation 3:7-13

In Revelation 2 and 3 the resurrected ascended Lord Jesus tells the apostle John to send letters to seven churches. These were actual churches with actual members who were pastored by actual pastors in an actual place. The reason these letters from Jesus were included in the New Testament was because these literal churches are representative of all churches. Every church in every generation can understand what pleases and displeases the Lord Jesus in His churches. Jesus’ words to these seven churches are as applicable to today’s churches – to our church – as they were to these seven churches in the late first century.

Today we are looking at the church at Philadelphia. Philadelphia was a much smaller city than the other six locations, but the church at Philadelphia was in no way inferior to these larger churches. While the church at Sardis (last message) had nothing from Jesus to commend it, the church at Philadelphia had nothing for Jesus to rebuke.

The church at Philadelphia was not a perfect church. There has never been a perfect church because people struggling with the power called sin in their members make up the membership of every church. The difference is that the leaders and the people of this church at Philadelphia were willing to follow the leaders God gave them and they were (from a human perspective) willing to take risks to obey what God told them to do.

Let’s go back to the title of this message: I am calling this church in Philadelphia *The Faithful Risk-Taking Church*. I long for FBC Powell to always be a risk-taking church that is obedient to the Lord Jesus. From God’s perspective, there are no risks. God knows the end from the beginning, and He controls every circumstance. He is all knowing and all powerful and thus “risk” is not involved in anything that God does. We, however, don’t know the future and we do not control circumstances. Once a church seeks the Lord to discern where He wants them to go and what He wants them to do, a “Philadelphia” like church says, “Here we go, stepping out in faith risking much, but trusting Him.” I am convinced that since the founding of FBC Powell in

1889, that has most often (not always) been the history of this church! I've been here a little over thirty-three years, but this was a risk taking, faith walking church long before I got here. Today we stand on the strong shoulders of the risk takers, the visionaries who came before us.

I am 100% convinced that the greatest days of this church are not behind us but ahead of us. If we will continue to obey Him and take what seems to us like risks, we will discover the supernatural things that our God can accomplish through a faithful, risk taking church! Let's prepare for our exciting future by examining the church at Philadelphia in the first century which had no condemnation from the Lord – only commendation.

The outlines for these seven+ churches are basically the same.

I. The Speaker (v. 7)

In previous messages, we saw that the word translated “angel” means “messenger” and most Bible scholars believe that the Lord is addressing this letter not to the heavenly angels but to the pastors to share with the churches. To this church at Philadelphia that Jesus gives them first an encouraging view of Himself – their Lord, the head of the church.

A. He Is Holy (v. 7a)

Only our Lord possesses perfect holiness. Jesus, God the Son is ascribing this attribute of holiness to Himself. He is declaring His deity. The word translated “holy” means to be set apart. Jesus is the personification of holiness. He is called “the Holy One” often in the Scriptures. John 6:69: “We have believed and have come to know that You are the Holy One of God.” Everything about Jesus is holy. He is holy in His character, holy in His words, holy in His actions; He is holiness personified! Here is what that should mean to us: 1 Peter 1:15: “but like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all *your* behavior.” Only when Christ is our life and we are surrendered to Him can we walk in holiness.

B. He Is True (v. 7b)

Five other times in Revelation, the attributes of holy and true are used together in referring to Jesus. This word translated “true” means genuine, authentic, and real. Because Jesus Christ alone is perfectly holy and perfectly true, He alone can be completely trusted.

C. He Is Sovereign (v. 7c)

When the word “key” is used in a context like this it speaks of *access* and *authority*. In Revelation 1:18 we are told that Jesus has the keys of death and Hades (translated “hell” in the KJV). In our text today, the keys are to salvation and blessing. What this passage is saying is that our access to God the Father and His riches is only through Jesus. John 14:6: “Jesus said to him, ‘I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me.’” Jesus is here claiming absolute sovereignty over His church. He alone opens and shuts the doors of salvation, provision, and opportunities.

Why did Jesus reveal Himself in this manner to the church at Philadelphia? It is because they had very little strength and resources. They needed to be reminded that their Savior had the keys and that success in the quest to bring Him glory is not tied into the size of the church, but the size of the church's Lord.

II. The Strengths (v. 8)

What is this “open door”? As we often say, “We must allow the Scripture to interpret Scripture.” The phrase “open door” is used many times by the Apostle Paul. Open doors most often refer to opportunities for ministry or evangelism. Let me share an example. 2 Corinthians 2:12 (NIV): “Now when I went to Troas to preach the gospel of Christ and found that the Lord had opened a door for me.” The Lord had also opened up some amazing opportunities for this small church in Philadelphia to do some really big things.

I believe that in this concept of the Lord opening or closing doors is the key to where a church – however weak and small they might be – focuses their mission. Author and pastor, Henry Blackaby, said that when a church focuses on being open and surrendered to the Lord, that church simply looks for doors that the Lord of the church opens. To put it another way, when we see God at work in the burdens He gives us and the open doors He shows us, we simply join Him and obey Him as to the specifics of what we are to do. That sounds too simple, but it’s not. Let’s look at some Scriptural examples of these open doors, some examples in recent history, and then some examples in our own church.

We see how the Lord guides His people by examining Paul’s second missionary journey. Paul attempted to go into the province of Asia to preach the Gospel, but the Holy Spirit closed that door. Paul then tried to go to Bithynia, but the Lord shut that door also. But when Paul came to Troas, he received a vision from a man from Macedonia beckoning him to come there. Paul took this as an open door from the Lord and the Gospel went to Macedonia and ultimately into Europe. What I am about to say may sound like an exaggeration, but I do not believe that it is. Some theologians and historians believe that this open door that the Apostle Paul walked through changed the course of the entire western world. You can read about all this in Acts 16 and in all the missionary journeys of Paul recorded in the book of Acts.

I am reminded as I look back on the years I’ve been at this church, that the times when we fell flat and failed to accomplish what we planned was when we tried to do something that we initiated without an open door and deep burden from the Lord. On the other hand, some of the things that God has and is mightily using began when God opened a door, gave deep burdens and desires to His people and we simply joined Him in what He is doing. That is especially evident in where we have focused in missions. I spent a lot of time this past week just writing out the amazing things that God has done in this church as we walked through the doors that God opened.

Let’s go back to the church at Philadelphia. I want to focus on the last part of verse 8: “...you have a little power.” In some translations, it sounds like their little power was a bad thing that God is rebuking. I don’t think that is what the lord is saying. Revelation 3:8 (NIV): “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.” Listen carefully – the Lord opened a door for this church *BECAUSE* they had little strength! The church at Philadelphia was so greatly used of God because they knew how weak they were and thus looked to God for strength. This is how God chooses to do His work in the world. It is through individuals and churches who know they are weak but are willing to step out in faith to follow Him. It is when we know that we are weak that we look to Him for His strength. 2 Corinthians 12:10 (NIV): “That is why, for Christ’s sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.” In our weakness, we become a conductor for His power.

This church at Philadelphia was commended because as they walked through the open doors, they had kept God's Word, and they refused to deny His name. These people in the church at Philadelphia were fiercely committed to God's Word. They proclaimed it, taught it, and believed it. They also had refused to deny His name. They were not ashamed to proclaim Him. This is why God set the open doors before them. God puts open doors before churches that operate in His strength because they are aware of their own weaknesses. This is a glorious truth!

III. Their Suffering (vv. 9-11)

The Church at Sardis that we looked at last week had no enemies because they were spiritually dead, and they were of no threat to Satan. The church at Philadelphia had enemies!

A. Their Enemies (v. 9)

There was a large population of Jewish in Philadelphia. It was some of the Jews who were physical descendants but certainly not spiritual descendants of Abraham that were persecuting the church. When these unbelieving Jews met in their synagogue, Jesus called it a synagogue of Satan. They were racially and culturally Jews, but spiritually they were not true Jews because they rejected the promised Messiah and Savior and persecuted His church. How is Jesus going to deal with them? For many of them, it seems that the church's faithfulness would be rewarded by the salvation of some of the very people who were persecuting them. Either they will be converted and bow with the church at Philadelphia in worship, or in judgment they will bow on a day in the future. God often chooses to use the love of a persecuted church to break their enemies and to see them converted. Our command as Christ's church is not to kill our enemies, but to love them to the cross that they may bow in submission and surrender to the Lord of the church.

B. Their Assurance (vv. 10-11)

Let me remind you that this passage is not just about this late first century church; these seven churches represent all churches until the time when the true church will be caught up to be with the Lord forever. There are some godly scholars who disagree in the details of how this passage is to be interpreted. When sincere people who love God and His word disagree on a passage, it behooves us to approach it with humility. I will tell you what I believe this passage is saying and I have adopted my view not because there are no good arguments from other views, but because I think that it fits best with all of the other Scriptures dealing with the same subject.

Jesus gives His church assurance that they are going to escape a horrible final tribulation that is coming. The true church has always undergone tribulation, but here He is talking about a time of persecution that is without precedence. He calls it in verse 10: "...the hour [time] of testing, that *hour* [time] which is about to come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth." I believe that this goes beyond one church. It encompasses not just the church at Philadelphia, but all true churches; it is the whole world which will be alive at that time in the future when He calls His church to Himself.

Let's notice some things about this "hour of trial" or "testing". I believe that this is referring to the church being caught up prior to the seven years of horrific tribulation that is coming upon the earth. This "catching up" is often called the "Rapture" of the church. Because the believers in Philadelphia had successfully passed so many trials (testings), Jesus promises to spare the church from the ultimate testing called "The Great Tribulation". We read in Matthew 24:21: "For then there will be a great tribulation, such as has not occurred since the beginning of the world

until now, nor ever will.” The sweeping nature of the promise to spare the church from this final time of tribulation extends far beyond the Philadelphia congregation in the late first century; it encompasses all faithful churches at that time of catching up or rapture. This verse promises that the true church (those who are in Christ) will be delivered from the final great tribulation.

We see additional assurance in verse 11. The word translated “quickly” does not mean “soon from the time this was written.” The Greek word translated “quickly” means “suddenly”. It does not mean immediately. It means that when it happens, there will be no warning or getting ready.

As the coming of Jesus Christ draws nearer, there is more and more pressure on the church to conform to the world, to compromise the clear teaching of God’s Word, and to let go of the truths that are in the Word of God but offend a world that hates Him. Jesus says, “Hold fast to what you have.” While it is not possible for a true Christian to lose their salvation, we can lose reward. ² John 1:8: “Watch yourselves, that you do not lose what we have accomplished, but that you may receive a full reward.”

C. Their Confidence (vv. 12-13)

Remember that all true Christians are overcomers. Here is what Jesus promises these faithful saints at Philadelphia.

1. Honor (v. 12a)

A pillar was an ancient symbol of security and strength. To a land scarred by massive earthquakes, Jesus says to the church at Philadelphia that He will make them pillars that no earthquake can shake. In places where massive earthquakes come, it is the pillars that stand. Also, it was a custom to erect a pillar to honor a dignitary or a person of great accomplishment. This simply means that the Lord will honor in Heaven those who stand firm in times of trials and persecution.

In addition, Jesus says: “...he will not go out from it anymore.” Those who go through massive earthquakes are often afraid to go inside their homes or other buildings. In heaven there are no earthquakes!

2. Ownership (v. 12b)

In that day, to write your name on something was a mark of ownership. A master would write his name upon his servants. He is saying that we are secure – our God has marked us as His by putting His name on us.

3. Fellowship (v. 12c)

What is that new name? We don’t know now, but we will. Jesus’ name represents the fullness of His person. This is a way of saying that we will know intimate fellowship of our Lord as He shares a special name with us. This special name reminds us of the security we have because we belong to God. Our citizenship is sure in the New Jerusalem, and our eternal fellowship with the Son of God is sure. What confidence!

Conclusion (v. 13)

That phrase, “He who has an ear to hear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches” closes all seven letters to the churches. Only those who savingly know Christ have ears to hear. Those without Christ cannot hear Him. Do you have ears to hear the Savior?

NASB (New American Standard Bible)

All scripture taken from the NASB unless otherwise indicated.

Scripture taken from the *New American Standard Bible*, © Copyright 1960, 1962, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 by the Lockman Foundation. Used by permission.

Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

NIV (New International Version)

Scripture taken from the *Holy Bible, New International Version*®. NIV®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, by International Bible Society. Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved.