

The Lord's Word to His Church: Philadelphia

As you know, we have been going through Revelation, chapters 2 and 3, and the letters to seven churches in Asia Minor that were written to those churches by the Lord Himself, the head of the church in the first century, and given to the apostle John to write down in the book of Revelation; and then to be sent along with the book to each of the seven churches, carried to those churches by a representative called here the angel of the church, or the messenger of the church. Apparently, they had gathered on the Isle of Patmos to visit the exiled apostle, and he distributed copies of the book of Revelation to each of them to take back to their church with a letter for each of the seven churches; and that began the distribution of the book of Revelation. That was at the end of the first century.

So we have been going through these seven letters, and we come today to chapter 3, verse 7, the letter to the church at Philadelphia. Let me begin reading in verse 7: "To the messenger of the church in Philadelphia write: He who is holy, who is true, who has the key of David, who opens and no one will shut, and who shuts and no one opens, says this: 'I know your deeds. Behold, I have put before you an open door which no one can shut, because you have a little power, and have kept My word, and have not denied My name. Behold, I will cause those of the synagogue of Satan, who say they are Jews and are not, but lie – I will make them come and bow down at your feet, and make them know that I have loved you. Because you have kept the word of My perseverance, I also will keep you from the hour of testing, that hour which is about to come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth. I am coming quickly; hold fast what you have, so that no one will take your crown. He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he will not go out from it any more; and 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. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.'"

Now, it is obvious to all of us that there is no such thing as a perfect church, for the obvious reason that there is no such thing as a perfect Christian; and a church then is a collection of imperfect Christians and, therefore, it is in itself imperfect. There is no such thing as a perfect pastor. We are all imperfect. We all fall short of the absolute standard of holiness that God has set. But having said that there's no such thing as a perfect Christian, or a perfect pastor, or a perfect church; and none of us can be everything that the Lord desires, nor collectively can we be completely the church that He desires, it is still possible to be faithful, to be obedient, to be diligent, and to please the Lord as a congregation.

It is possible to be a church that the Lord blesses because that church is genuinely faithful to Him, and that is the case of the church at Philadelphia that I just read about. It is a little church, as indicated by the fact, verse 8, that it has a little power. That is to say the power isn't minimal, but the size of the church is small. It's a little church in Philadelphia, in Asia Minor.

This is a little church in the first century like the church gathered in the town of Smyrna, and the church that is gathered in the other towns that we've learned about in chapters 2 and 3. This church receives a letter from the Lord Jesus, and in that letter, like the church at Smyrna, there are no warnings, there are no condemnations, there are no threats, there are no judgments. This letter is free from any condemnation, from any criticism at all. So here in the sixth church that is given a letter in Asia Minor, we find a church that is pleasing to the Lord, acceptable to the Lord.

To the church in Ephesus, you remember, our Lord acknowledged that they were committed to the truth: they hated heresy, they hated evil. But they faced judgment, you remember, because they had forsaken zealous love for Christ, they had left their first love, and they were threatened with judgment. And then to the Pergamum, our Lord acknowledged that they were holding to the Lord in the face of persecution, but they too faced judgment because they were compromising with the world. They were compromising with idolatry and immorality.

And then came the letter to the church at Thyatira and, again, our Lord acknowledged significant deeds, and evidences of love and faith and service. But this church had gone beyond compromising with the world. It had thrown the doors open and let the world in. And here was a church that sin had entered, and sin was being accepted and advocated inside the church, including adultery. So the church at Thyatira faces judgment.

And then we saw the letter to the church at Sardis. Our Lord acknowledged nothing about them, only that they had a name, but that they were spiritually dead. We saw that last time. Like *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* by Coleridge many years ago, corpses man the ship, dead men pull the oars, dead men hoist the sails, dead men steer the vessels. Sardis was a dead church. There was a little bit of life there, and our Lord speaks to that little bit of life with hope. There is a progression here. There is the loss of first love, and then comes compromise with the world, and the world comes in and sin is accepted, and then the church begins to die – that's the progress. Ultimately, it ends up like Laodicea; it is a church the Lord will spew out of His mouth. It is a church that He's not even in, and He's on the outside knocking on the door. But before we get to that final phase, we come to the church at Philadelphia, and there's a break in this tragic progression.

Now, Philadelphia was 30 miles south-east of Sardis in Asia Minor. It was founded after Attalus, the king of Pergamum in 189, came to that area. He was nicknamed Philadelphia because he was known as having a special love for his brother, and that became the name of the city which he founded. It was rich in agriculture, which was assisted by volcanic ash. There were elements of volcanic ash deposited in that area, Asia Minor, and it helped grow things more rapidly. The city, like so many other ancient cities, stood on a hill above a long valley. The volcanic ash indicates that there was volcanic action in the area; and there were frequent, and rather devastating, earthquakes.

The city was a hub of, I guess what you could call Greco-Asiatic civilisation because it was kind of on the line between Greece in the West and Asia in the East. It was this city that became sort of the initiator of the spread of Greek language into that Lydian area. They spoke the language called Lydian, and it was gone by about 19 A.D. This city was significant in really spreading the Greek language and replacing the language of the Lydian region. It pushed Greek culture backwards, as you could say, into the East, into the Orient. It was a city that originally was on the trade route to the East. It was an imperial road, an imperial road stop in the first century A.D. At one time, one of the greatest trade routes ran through this city east and west.

We are told that in A.D. 17, a powerful earthquake destroyed 12 cities in the area, including Sardis and Philadelphia. And, again, in 60 A.D., an earthquake destroyed Laodicea. All of them were in this area where there were active volcanos. The emperor, the Caesar Tiberius, helped rebuild Philadelphia; he helped rebuild Sardis. So a monument was made to him and he was worshipped there.

We don't know anything about the church. It was one of those churches founded, we read in [Acts 19:10](#), because the gospel extended out of Ephesus into all of Asia Minor, the church at Philadelphia was founded. A few years after John wrote the revelation at the end of the first century, the early church father Ignatius passed through Philadelphia on his way to martyrdom in Rome. We know very little about the city. We know a fact like that, and we also know that some of the believers from Philadelphia were martyred with Polycarp at Smyrna. That's about all we know. The church actually lasted in Philadelphia for centuries, standing firm, until the whole region was overrun by the Muslims in the fourteenth century. That is the background of this city and this region and this church. But let's look at the letter in particular.

"To the messenger of the church in Philadelphia write:" This is a representative from that church that will carry back the book of Revelation, and in particular, this letter for that church. "To the messenger of the church in Philadelphia write:" and here the author, as He does in each case, introduces Himself, "He who is holy, who is true, who has the key of David, who opens and no one will shut, and who shuts and no one opens, says this:" This is a description. This is a description of the author, and it is the first description of the author that is not drawn from the vision in chapter 1, or drawn from the revelation in chapter 1. This is a description of the author that we don't see in that vision in chapter 1, but it fits this faithful church.

The author describes Himself in four distinct ways. It is very Hebrew; it is very Old Testament: "He who is holy." This can refer to no other than God. This can refer to no other than God. And it is to say then that Jesus Christ, who is the head of the church and the author of the letter, is God Himself.

We know back in Isaiah, chapter 6, that God is declared "holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts." And we also know that in the gospel of John that we are told that that vision of God is Isaiah 6 was a vision of the Son of God. He is the Holy One. Psalm 16, "You will not allow Your Holy One to see corruption," referring to Christ and His resurrection. When He was born, He was called "that Holy Child."

In John 6, the disciples said, "He is the Holy One of God." Consistently, our Lord is identified as God, and therefore is the Holy One. In [Revelation 4:8](#), again, "Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God, the Almighty who was and who is and who is to come." God is holy, and Christ is holy as well. So here we find that the writer is introduced as "the One who is holy," and that, of course, is God; and since Christ is God, it refers to Him.

Do you remember in Mark, chapter 1, when the demons said to Him, "Jesus of Nazareth, have you come to destroy us? I know who you are, the Holy One of God." This is a common title for Messiah.

The Lord Jesus shares the holiness of God. He is God; He is the Holy One. He is the one of whom Peter writes, "The Holy One who calls you. So be holy yourselves in all your behaviour."

Now, this could be a very frightening introduction because holiness cannot tolerate sin. Holiness cannot look upon iniquity and look upon evil; and, yet, the Holy One introduces Himself as such, and gives no rebuke, and no threat, and no warning, and no condemnation, and no judgment on this church. It is the Holy One who speaks well of this church.

He is not only the Holy One, He is – and, again, this is an Old Testament kind of designation: "He who is holy, who is true, who is true: the True One."

[Revelation 6:10](#), "O Lord, holy and true." Again, this is God, two magnificent attributes of His absolute character: holiness and truth. He is holy; He is true.

The word for true here is not the word *alths* which means a true statement. It is the word *althin* which means authentic, genuine, real, as opposed to the false and the fake. He is the true God, not the false one. And Jesus is God. He is the holy and genuine God in person. He is perfect in His righteousness, and He is true in His character and all that He says.

And, again, it is remarkable that He introduces Himself this way, and that there is no condemnation. He is true, and His truth is an absolute standard, and against that truth is measured every lie and it falls short. He is the Holy God who can't tolerate sin. He is the true God who has no place for error or falsehood, and still He does not rebuke this church.

He is further identified in verse 7 as the one who has the key of David, has the key of David. He is called the root of David a couple of times in the book of Revelation. Here, He possesses the key of David. To say He's the root of David means that He is – Christ is God, and He is the source of David. David calls Him Lord, and David also identifies Him as Son.

He has the key of David. What does that mean? He has the Messianic authority. In the line of David, He is the Messiah. He possesses the key. The key is the emblem of authority, ultimate control, sovereignty. This is a direct reference, by the way, back to Isaiah 22, where speaking of Eliakim, the son of Hilkiah, who had the key to all the treasures of the king, he has authority over the royal treasury. He can open its riches, and disperse them and dispense them. The key of David then is the ultimate Messianic authority over all the royal riches of heaven. Jesus Christ then is the Holy One, the True One, and the one who has access to all the treasures of heaven, and who pours them out by His own sovereign will on His people. Sovereign authority: to open the riches of heaven to anyone.

So the one who writes is holy and still does not condemn. The one who writes is true and still does not condemn. The one who writes is sovereign and still does not lock up any of heaven's blessings. He is the root of David, the one who brought David into existence. He is the offspring of David, born in the line of David. He is the Anointed King, the Messiah. He has all the authority to dispense all of heaven's blessings.

Ephesians says we are blessed in Christ with all spiritual blessings. He has complete control of the kingdom and its resources. "He opens – " verse 7 says " – and when He opens, no one will shut. And He shuts and no one opens." What does that mean? That means that He is the one who decides who enters the kingdom. He is the one who decides who enters the kingdom. He holds the keys.

Back in chapter 1, verse 18, He has the keys of death and Hades. He has the keys to death and the grave. He has the key to hell. He has the key to heaven. This is majesty at its highest possible point. He is the one who said, "I am come that you might have life." He is the one who came to seek and to save that which was lost.

So it is the Lord Jesus, the Holy One, the True One, the one who dispenses all of heaven's blessings, the one who opens the door of the kingdom, the door of salvation at His own sovereign choice. Only He does it. "No man can come to the Father but by Me," He said. "I am the door. I am the way, the truth, and the life." Without Christ, we cannot enter the kingdom. He alone provides entrance for us.

In verse 8, He says to those in Philadelphia, "I have put before you an open door which no one can shut. I've opened the kingdom to you. I've given you access to everything in the kingdom." The exact emphasis of this statement is to affirm our Lord's grace toward these true believers.

The correspondent then, the author of this letter, the Lord Jesus Christ, who is God – holy, true, sovereign, powerful, who is all of these things – looks at this church in Philadelphia and has nothing to rebuke, nothing to condemn, nothing to chasten them about, nothing to warn them about, nothing at all for which they should be threatened with judgement. That is encouraging. That is encouraging, because they weren't a perfect church. There can't be a perfect church. But they were a true church and they were a faithful church. And, consequently, the Lord opened the kingdom to them and all its blessings, and all its treasures.

Now, in verse 8, there is a divine commendation, there is a divine commendation. Let me read it again and I'll read down to verse 10 just to pull it all together: "I know your deeds. Behold, I have put before you an open door which no one can shut because you have a little power, and have kept My word, and have not denied My name. Behold, I will cause those of the synagogue of Satan, who say that they are Jews and are not, but lie – I will make them come and bow down at your feet, and make them know that I have loved you. Because you have kept the word of My perseverance, I also will keep you from the hour of testing, that hour which is about to come upon the whole world to test those who dwell on the earth."

There are some really rich treasures in those words. Here is our Lord's blessing on a faithful church. What the Lord desires for a church is fulfilled here. Again, it's not a perfect church, it can't be. But it is a church into which the Lord pours blessing. Or, if you want to look at it another way, it is a church to whom He opens the doors to the kingdom and gives access to all its treasures.

And, again, nothing escapes Him. Verse 8: "I know your deeds. I know your deeds." The holy, true, sovereign, powerful Lord knows everything there is to know about them. He never says anything specific about the church in Philadelphia. He doesn't discuss any specific issues or specific qualities. He just generally affirms that they are a church that He will bless.

And what characterised them? First of all, He says, "You have a little power, a little *dunamis*. It's best to understand that not as some kind of feeble church, but a small church, a small group of people. Their power was small because they were few. It was not a sin issue that limited their power. It was not a Holy Spirit issue that limited their power. They had spiritual power, but evidently, they were not very large; and so relatively speaking, their power was small. This would be consistent with what we know about the promise of God in the design of the church.

In Scripture, we learn, from the apostle Paul, that the Lord chooses a few, and the Lord chooses the poor, and the lowly, and the undistinguished, and the nobodies, and the nothings, the little flock. Such is the stuff through which power flows, even though it be small. A little power, like a grain of mustard seed, can move mountains. Spiritual power was flowing in that small church. That means, that means that they were true worshippers, true lovers of Christ, that they were holding to the truth, and they were in obedience to it.

And that's the second commendation: "You have a little power and have kept My word, have obeyed My word." They were bound to the Scripture. They did not deviate from a pattern of obedience to the Lord; they obeyed. This is the mark – we've seen it in John 14 and 15. This is a mark of a true believer: "If you're Mine, you obey Me. If you're Mine, you obey Me. You have kept My Word."

John in his epistle in 1 John basically says, "This is the acid test of a true Christian; a true Christian obeys his Lord." So they were characterised by power and obedience. They were also characterised by loyalty: "And have not denied My name." That indicates to Me that there was some pressure for them to do that.

Back in chapter 2, verse 13, of the church at Pergamum, where Satan's throne is, "They held fast My name and did not deny My faith." They had other problems, as we remember. But this church was loyal as well. They did not fold under the pressure of persecution. They did not leave their first love. They did not absorb the world. They did not tolerate sin."

In chapter 14 of Revelation, and verse 12, we read, "Here is the perseverance of the saints who keep the commandments of God and their faith in Jesus." "You have not denied My name. You're true believers."

There are warnings, of course, in Scripture about those who deny the name of the Lord. But those who endure in faith to the end are those who are genuine. They were true to the Lord Jesus. When it says, "You have not denied My name. My name is the sum of all that I am, of all that I am. You have not denied who I am." The preaching of the gospel in the book of Acts was the preaching of the name of Christ, which sums up all that He is.

So this is a church characterised by power, obedience, loyalty, and one more: endurance, endurance, perseverance. They were persevering. They were sustaining their commitment: "You have kept the word – " verse 10 " – of My perseverance." Another way to say that: "You have kept My command to endure patiently. You have kept My command to endure patiently."

Again, this indicates there was persecution – and we would expect that. The Lord told them they were going to be hated by the world. They were going to be persecuted, they were going to be mistreated by Jews, they were going to be mistreated by Gentiles. This is going to be life for a Christian. But they had kept the command of the Lord to endure patiently. He requires that of His own.

Back in Matthew 10, back in Matthew 24, the requirement was to endure patiently to the end. Chapter 1, verse 9, John, the brother and fellow partaker in tribulation, and kingdom, and perseverance. Persevered, faithful to the Word of God and the testimony of Jesus. Through trials and persecution, these faithful Christians patiently took it all and never wavered in their commitment to Christ. This is the true church, the faithful church. Nothing scandalous. Not perfect, but faithful. And there are churches like that today. There are churches like that today.

I would like to believe with all my heart that our church is a faithful church. And if the pouring out of the blessing of God is an indication of faithfulness, then certainly, He has poured out lavish blessings on this congregation. He has opened the doors of the kingdom and brought us all in and given us access to all the riches of heaven.

Philadelphia, because of its power, its obedience, its loyalty, and its endurance, was given some amazing privileges. From that sort of divine commendation, we come to what we could call divine commitment, divine commitment. Have to go back to verse 8. That divine commitment starts with, "I have put before you an open door which no one can shut. I'm giving you full access to the kingdom and no one can alter that. I'm giving you an open door to the kingdom."

And I would even go so far as to say, and I think it's fair to say, that they became a church that was able to usher others through that open door. This open door has overtones of gospel opportunity, gospel witness, gospel preaching, evangelistic outreach. An open door, by the way, is a Pauline image for freedom and proclamation of the gospel. Paul talks about it in 1 Corinthians 16, 2 Corinthians 2, Colossians 4.

That little church no doubt had an open door that those passing through that town on that trade route, and those who lived in that town, were introduced to, and some of them were ushered through those doors by the grace of God into the kingdom. Remember, the apostle Paul wrote to the Corinthians. He said, "There are many adversaries, but there is an open door." So I think the promise of an open door means that they were a place where people could come to enter the kingdom.

Now, the Lord promises them in verse 9 a very significant promise: "I will cause those of the synagogue of Satan, who say they are Jews and are not, but lie – I will make them come and bow down at your feet, and make them know that I have loved you." Apparently, in that town, there was a Jewish population large enough to have a synagogue – not surprising – a local Jewish synagogue, occupied by Jews who said they were Jews, but are not.

What does that mean? Does that mean they weren't Jewish? Does that mean that they were claiming and ethnicity that wasn't true? No, no. It really is language that reminds us of Romans, chapter 2.

Paul in Romans, chapter 2, makes it very clear, verse 28: "He is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh. But he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that which is of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter; and his praise not from men, but from God." A true Jew is one who is a Jew inwardly, not outwardly. "They say they are Jews, but they are not. They

lie." In the language of [Romans 2:28-29](#), "They are not true Jews. They are a synagogue of Satan. They are not led by God, they are led by Satan." That's familiar language, isn't it?

John 8, Jesus said to the leaders of Israel, "You're of your father, the devil." They were Jews, claiming to be Jews, but they were not true Jews either. Their father was not God; their father was Satan. No doubt this Jewish group of Jews who were not true Jews, that constituted this synagogue under the power of Satan, had been attacking this small group.

Persecution was coming from the Jews, as it had in the very beginning to our Lord and the apostles. "They say they're Jews, they're not." They lie. They claim it, but they are not. They are not true sons of God. They are not true sons of Abraham. They may be Jews genetically, legally, ceremonially, but they are not Jews spiritually. The church was being hit by their hostility; and this is what was happening in Smyrna.

Go back to chapter 2, verse 9: "I know your tribulation and your poverty (but you're rich), and the blasphemy by those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan." Again, in Smyrna, it was this fierce persecution from the Jews that God used to purify that church. That's the only other church that is never condemned in these seven letters.

Here, again, persecution at the hands of Jewish people who hate the gospel and are really a synagogue of Satan, is coming at the church in Philadelphia. And the Lord makes an amazing promise: "I will make them come and bow down at your feet, and make them know that I have loved you." Jewish people from a synagogue bowing down to Gentiles and learning that it is the Gentiles that the Lord God loves.

What do you mean, "I will make you come and bow down – I'll make them come and bow down at your feet"? That's the posture of a humbled and defeated enemy. That's the posture of a humbled and defeated enemy. That is precisely what that picture is indicating. "They are you adversaries, they are your enemies, they're making life difficult for you, there is persecution: I will make them bow."

Listen to [Isaiah 45:14](#), "Thus says the Lord, 'The products of Egypt and the merchandise of Cush and the Sabeans, men of stature, will come over to you and will be yours. They will walk behind you, they will come over in chains and will bow down to you. They will make supplication to you. Surely, God is with you, and there is no one else, no other God.' That's what they will say. 'Truly, You are a God who hides Himself, O God of Israel, Saviour! They will be put to shame and even humiliated, all of them.'" This is a humiliation.

Isaiah makes reference to it several times again in chapter 49, verse 23: "Kings will be your guardians, and their princesses your nurses. They will bow down to you with their faces to the earth and lick the dust of your feet; and you will know that I am the Lord. Those who hopefully wait for Me will not be put to shame."

And one more reference in chapter 60 and verse 14: "The sons of those who afflicted you will come bowing to you, and all those who despised you will bow themselves at the soles of your feet; and they will call you the city of the Lord, the Zion of the Holy One of Israel." Gentiles who are the church are going to have Jews bow to them. Gentile rulers had always tried to make the Jews bow; but here, the Jews do the bowing.

What does this mean? I think it means salvation came to Jews in Philadelphia. I think the door was open to the kingdom there, which means they were preaching the gospel, and Christ, the way into the kingdom; and God graciously saved their persecutors, the very Jews that persecuted them.

This, of course, makes us think way beyond that, to the fact that through faithful churches throughout church history, God has been saving Jews and Gentiles. And in the future at the end of the age, the Jews will believe: "All Israel will be saved – " [Romans 11](#) " – and they will come, and they will bow down and say, 'Blessed are the feet of those who preach the gospel.'" "A blessed Gentile church will be used by God to provoke Israel to jealousy and to salvation," that's [Romans 11:13-14](#). "They will come to know that I, the Lord, have loved you."

Hard for Jews to accept that. Think of Jonah: hard to accept Gentile salvation. The Jews throughout church history, and finally in the end, will see the blessing of God has been on the church. They will see that God has loved us.

And they are seeing it. This church is full of Jewish people who've come to Christ. This is a church with an open door. We preach Christ; we preach salvation; we preach the gospel. The door to the kingdom is open here, and people come through by the grace of God; and many are Jews through the years. But in the end, the whole nation will bow to the truth of the gospel proclaimed by the redeemed saints.

There is more in verse 10, a promise that is really remarkable: "Because you have kept the word of My perseverance, or because you have obeyed My command to endure patiently and faithfully – through the persecution, through the deprivation, through the difficulty – because you have endured, I also will keep you from the hour of testing, that which is about to come upon the whole world to test those who dwell on the earth."

We don't know what that is specifically; we don't know. There isn't anything that we can point to in history that is that vast and sweeping that happens, say, at the end of the first century or the beginning of the second century. It could be a historical illusion to some other event that occurred, some natural disaster, some war, some elevated persecution. Persecution, of course, came in huge waves; but we don't have any particular historical event to point to. But if it does refer to a historical event, they were kept from the devastation of that historical event. It would come.

It would come on the whole world, and that may be from their perspective, their world – and the use of the word "world" is always limited to a context. It came as a kind of test, a kind of judgment to those who dwell on the earth. And if it was something temporal and something that actually happened in history, that little church was spared, that was spared. But there may be something more here because the language is very, very sweeping.

Let's just look at verse 10 and take it as a general principle. "If you are a true believer and you have endured – " that's the evidence of true salvation, the perseverance of the saints. "If you're a true Christian, a true believer, and you have maintained obedience to the Word of God, the evidence of new life, I also will keep you from the hour of testing that which is about to come upon the whole world to test those who dwell on the earth."

What is this? Something future: "I will keep." Something limited: "An hour of testing." It has a limitation: "Something designed to be a trial, a testing; something worldwide, the whole world." Something inclusive: "The whole world." Something that is coming on non-Christians: "To test those who dwell on the earth." And that, by the way, "those who dwell on the earth," is a phrase repeated in the book of Revelation about half a dozen times or more, and always refers to unbelievers.

So what is this? What is this hour of testing, this limited time of distress that is coming on the entire world to test unbelievers? What is it? It doesn't sound like a simple present distress in the city of Philadelphia. It's not a permanent or eternal trial. It doesn't seem to be local; it doesn't seem to be partial. It comes on everybody on the earth, all the unbelievers, but not the faithful church.

Is this the Holy Spirit giving us a look down to the end of the history of redemption when a time of severe judgment comes on the earth, a time that the Bible calls the great tribulation, the tribulation, Daniel's Seventieth Week; a time that is described to us starting in Revelation 6 through Revelation 18; a time that is described in sequences of sealed judgments, trumpet judgments, and bold judgments that come on the earth that are just devastating beyond comprehension? It's about to come, not in the sense that it's coming in days or weeks, but it's next, it's imminent, it's nearer every day – like our salvation, Romans 13, is nearer than when we believed.

Could this be the time of tribulation, the time of great tribulation spoken of by Daniel, Ezekiel, Zachariah, Revelation? And here, is our Lord not saying then to the church, "I will keep you from the hour of testing. The present trouble will be enough. The final test that comes on the whole world will not be for the faithful."

Can it mean that we will not go through that final test? This is one of the passages which is used to help us understand the pre-tribulation rapture, the pre-tribulation rapture. We know we'll be kept from the eternal wrath to come, [1 Thessalonians 1:10](#). But is this text saying to us, "You will be kept, be kept because of your faithfulness from the temporal wrath that is to come on the whole world and all unbelievers"?

I don't think, I don't think we could say that our Lord means, "Because you have obeyed and persevered and endured, as a reward, I will throw you into the tribulation, I will make you go through the

tribulation." That doesn't seem to be a blessing. "I will keep you from the hour of testing, keep you from it." They're promised deliverance. They're promised exemption.

Unfaithful churches will experience judgment here and now, temporal judgment. We saw that in chapter 1, chapter 2, and chapter 3; the Lord speaks of judgment. But here He is saying, "There is coming a time on the whole world, and I will keep you from that." The phrase in the Greek is *tre ek*, out of. It can't be meaning that "I will protect you through it," because the believers who live during that time are killed.

Same phrase *tre ek* is used in [John 17:15](#), the only other use; and, clearly, our Lord is praying in [John 17:15](#) to the Father – I'll just remind you of what He says. "I do not ask You to take them out of the world, but to keep them from the evil one." Same phrase: "Keep them from the evil one." That doesn't mean that He's asking the Father to put us in the hands of the evil one and protect us there. He's praying that the Father keep us out of the hands of the evil one where the whole world lies. The language here then leads us to believe that those who are part of the faithful church in the end will be kept out of, or out from that time of trial. This may be a look at that future because of the next statement in verse 11: "I'm coming quickly. I'm coming quickly."

He said to the church at Ephesus, chapter 2 and verse 5: "I'm coming, but I'm coming to remove your lampstand out of its place, unless you repent. I'm coming to shut down the church."

He said in chapter 2, verse 16, to the church at Pergamum: "I'm coming, and I'm coming to make war with the sword of My mouth." And to the church at Sardis in chapter 3, verse 3, He said, "I will come like a thief, and you'll not know at what hour I will come to you." In the case of those churches, He said, "I'm coming to judge you. I'm coming to shut you down if you don't repent." But those are, those are judgments on those churches.

But here He says, "You're not going through that final time of testing. I am coming quickly to take you out. Hold fast what you have so that no one will take your crown." What does that mean, "So that no one will do anything to cause you to lose your reward"?

You can't lose your salvation, but you can lose your reward. Yes, you can forfeit your heavenly reward. You can accumulate heavenly reward as a faithful believer. You can be obedient to the Lord and be literally laying up treasure in heaven, placing, as it were, gold, silver, precious stones there. [Second John 8](#) says, "Watch yourselves that you do not lose what we have accomplished, but that you may receive a full reward."

We can't say for certain because nothing in the text says it. We can't say for certain that this drives us forward to that final eschatological event. But it's pretty consistent in Scripture that the Holy Spirit does things like this.

Many places in Scripture, in prophetic texts that look at the future, there are near and far fulfilments. This could well be telling us that we will be taken out in a rapture described in 1 Thessalonians 4: "The trumpet will sound, the dead in Christ will rise and will be caught up into the air to meet the Lord." A lot of other passages support that; this is just one that may indicate that.

This "quickly coming" can't be Revelation 19 because there's no judgment. This is a coming quickly that appears to be a deliverance from that final hour, and tells us as believers to be faithful, hold on, so that no one takes our crown: hold fast. Won't be easy. Wasn't easy, I guess, for the church in Philadelphia to hold on. So there's divine commendation and divine commitment, and then divine counsel, verse 12: "He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar. He who overcomes."

We know that by now, back to [1 John 5:5](#) he who overcomes: "Who is he that overcomes, even our faith, the one who believes." This is just another way of saying, "He who is a true believer, who has overcome the world through faith in Christ."

If you're a believer, if you're an overcomer – this is counsel to the true Christian, the genuine believer – here is the good news. This is promise that comes to comfort us, to encourage us. I say counsel in the sense of comfort. This is divine encouragement, divine comfort: "I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God."

And, again, these kinds of things could fit well into an eschatological interpretation of the text because it immediately moves into eternal blessing. Four eternal blessings are given here: "I'll make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he will not go out from it any more."

What does that mean? You're going to live in heaven forever, that's what it means – permanent, immovable place in heaven. "An eternal inheritance – " 1 Peter 1 " – that is undefiled, undiminished, unfading, reserved in heaven for you." To folks used to earthquakes which devastated their world, this was a promise. Maybe their homes would be destroyed, maybe their possessions would be devastated; but there was an unshakable, immovable place for them in God's temple in heaven.

What does it mean to be a pillar? Pillars in great temples were dedicated to people. The pillar would have the name of a well-known or famous or honoured person carved on the temple pillar. Our names will be carved, as it were, into the temple of heaven.

Secondly, "I will write upon him the name of My God." It's equivalent to possession, ownership. It's just a stunning thing, isn't it, that there's going to be a temple in heaven, metaphorically speaking. A pillar in that temple will have your name on it, and God will write His name on you. It's incredibly gracious, stunning mercy. We will be forever God's, forever honoured.

And then we will have also the name of the city of My God. We will have a pillar with our name on it that we are a permanent citizen of heaven. God will put His name on us. We belong to Him, and the name of the city of My God, the New Jerusalem that comes down from God out of heaven, which indicates our everlasting citizenship. Forever we are citizens with all rights and privileges to the Eternal City.

And He will write on us, "My new name, My new name – " the Lord says, " – My new name." What could that name be? Well, when He died, the Father raised Him from the dead and gave Him a name that is above every name, the name Lord. Whatever that name is, be it Lord or a name we've never heard, it will be the name that encompasses the fullness of His eternal majesty. The name will encompass the fullness of His eternal majesty.

This is a little church with power, loyalty, obedience, endurance, faithfulness. The Lord threw the doors open and heaven was made accessible, the riches of the kingdom available. And this little church was used by God to bring people to those open doors, and the Spirit of God ushered them into the kingdom. This church had such an evangelistic impact that even its Jewish persecutors bowed down and embraced the gospel they once persecuted; and for folks like this, the promise is that you will escape the coming holocaust. If it was a temporal one: that.

But going even further: those who are faithful will escape that final tribulation that comes on the whole world. And when the Lord comes, it won't be to judge. He will come to reward them; to give them a pillar with their name on it in the heavenly temple; to write His own name on them; to write the name of the city, indicating their citizenship, "the New Jerusalem which comes down out of heaven from My God," and even to write the name that belongs to Christ. Whatever that name is, the fullness of His eternal majesty is encompassed in that name. We are God's; we are Christ's; we are citizens of heaven; we will be forever honoured there.

This is comfort beyond imagination. This is a message that if any pastor would hear this, you would think that he couldn't move fast enough to become this kind of church, right? Any person in spiritual leadership wouldn't want to hear, "I'm coming to shut you down. I'm coming to judge you. I'm coming to condemn you. I'm coming to discipline you. I'm coming to punish you." A church would want to hear, "I'm coming to honour you. I'm coming to protect you. I'm coming to bless you." So verse 13 says, like all the rest, "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."

The holy, true, sovereign, mighty Lord knew everything about this church. And they were not perfect, but they were faithful. And He poured out heaven's privileges on them; gave them opportunity to be the open door for the gospel; promised to deliver them from the hour of testing; and to come quickly, take them to heaven, and give them everlasting privileges. The blessedness of being a faithful church.

Father, we're grateful for Your Word. This is a powerful and enriching portion of Scripture. We feel a little bit overwhelmed by all of it; it's just so amazing. We thank You; thank You from the bottom of our hearts for Your kindness to us. But we live in hope, a living hope, that we have this to look forward to. Lord, make us continue to be faithful, loyal, obedient, loving, persevering, in the midst of persecution. And may our persecutors bow before us as they hear the gospel and are broken into repentance and faith in Christ.

Continue to use this church, as You have in the past, to pour out Your blessings. And we thank You for the privilege. What we are enjoying now is a small taste of what you have prepared for us in glory. We're so eager to see the reality of all that. Even so, come, Lord Jesus. Amen.

