

A message to Philadelphia – Embrace an eternal perspective.



Revelation 3:7-13

(Expanded Sermon Notes)

This week, we pick back up in the book of Revelation after a two-week break for Easter. As we have been going through the second section in Revelation, we are reminded of the reality that the seven churches were real churches that faced real pressures. Their stories, commendations, warnings, and being called out remind us that we are not all that different from them. In fact, in each church, we can see a part of ourselves, our struggles, and how we are growing to be like Jesus.

In Jesus' words to this church, we do not hear a condemnation or warning as we have will all the others except Smyrna. That is not to say that this was a perfect church, it wasn't, and there won't be one on this side of heaven. Instead, we a church that is thriving and healthy spiritually even in the midst of significant social pressure and their relatively small numbers. Jesus reminds them that what he has given, no one can take away. Even as they are living in a place that is on the crossroads of ideas and culture, they are to continue enduring patiently even as they do not seem to have any influence. Why? Because Jesus is ultimately in control of history and does not lack for power or influence. Again, what he has given them, no one can take away, and they are to live out of that new identity. In other words, **eternally changed people look for the eternal perspective.**

1. Philadelphia – A city at the crossroads.

- a. Its physical location.
 - i. Philadelphia was founded c.140 BC at the junction of the approaches to Mysia, Lydia and Phrygia. It was not unjustly called 'the gateway to the East'. Its founder, Attalus II Philadelphus of Pergamum, from whom the city derived its name, intended it to be a center of missionary activity for the Hellenistic way of life. The city was prosperous, partly from its strategic situation, partly from the grape growing that flourished in the vicinity. **It was a center of worship of the god Dionysos, but contained also temples to many other gods. Volcanic activity caused hot springs in the vicinity, but also earthquakes from time to time. Philadelphia suffered from the earthquake of AD 17 and received imperial assistance for rebuilding.**
 - ii. **The church was evidently small (v. 8), but of good quality. Its enemies came from outside, not inside, for there is no mention of heresy or factiousness.** It had a good deal in common with that at Smyrna. Both receive no blame, only praise. Both suffered

from those who called themselves Jews and were not, both were persecuted it would seem by the Romans, both are assured that the opposition is satanic, and both are promised a crown.¹

1. The people of Philadelphia would appreciate references to a new name more than most. While the name Philadelphia persisted, twice the city had received a new name: that of Neocaesarea, as a sign of gratitude for Tiberius's help in rebuilding after the earthquake, and later Flavia, after the family name of the emperor Vespasian.²
- b. How does this fit us, today?
 - i. In many ways this city was at the crossroads of culture and ideas.
 1. As a University town, we can understand this in a unique way. Ames is a place that does not lack for ideas. That is not to say that we're the cultural epicenter that New York, Paris, or London are. But we are uniquely situated in a setting where there is a natural competition for ideas.
 2. **Christianity in many ways, was just one offering in the marketplace of ideas in Philadelphia. It is also one offering in a marketplace of ideas here in Ames.**
 - a. This can feel discouraging, and in fact, in many ways, this church who was enduring, was running out of gas and energy because they had little influence in the marketplace of ideas.
 - b. This makes the image of Jesus all that more important to them and to us.
- c. **Jesus – Holy, True, Key holder, One who opens and shuts. (v.7)**
 - i. This description of Jesus is reflective of how Jesus was described in 1:5.
 1. Although Christ's self-description in v 7 is not as much a verbatim development of something in ch. 1 as the previous ones have been, it is nevertheless just as much tied in. If ὁ ἅγιος, ὁ ἀληθινός ("the holy, the true") is original (so C Ɔ latt sy co Epiph), **then it probably is a paraphrastic development of "faithful witness" in 1:5a**, especially since ἀληθινός in the self-description in 3:14 clearly develops the same clause from 1:5a. Jesus, the holy and true witness, will empower those faithful to him to be like witnesses.³
 2. **Jesus Christ** - The third source of grace and peace is *Jesus Christ*, mentioned for the third time in the prologue (and not again throughout the book; John prefers simply 'Jesus'). **He is the faithful witness (cf. 3:14; Ps. 89:37). John put emphasis on witness in verse 2 and this hammers his point home. He leaves us in no doubt that what he reports is well attested.**⁴
 - a. This threefold description is meant **"to encourage ... believers about to enter severe persecution," since they can have confidence that Christ has suffered the same thing and overcome it and that therefore they will be empowered to do likewise.**⁵

¹ Leon Morris, *Revelation: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 20, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1987), 80.

² Leon Morris, *Revelation: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 20, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1987), 83.

³ G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle, Cumbria: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 1999), 283.

⁴ Leon Morris, *Revelation: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 20, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1987), 54.

⁵ G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle, Cumbria: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 1999), 190.

- b. In calling Jesus **the ruler over the kings of the earth**, John is **lifting the horizon of his readers' perspective above the earthly rulers**, who are the visible source of their sufferings, to Him who sits enthroned above the kings of the earth, exercising absolute sovereignty over them (Prov. 21:1; Dan. 2:21; 4:17).⁶
 - ii. **When we feel as if we have no influence → We need to ask, who are we?**
 1. The church is greeted by one who is *holy* and *true* (epithets applied to God in 6:10). *Holy* denotes connection with deity (cf. Isa. 40:25; Hab. 3:3). It is used widely throughout the New Testament. *True* (*alēthinos*) is not often applied to people, either in the New Testament or elsewhere. **It indicates that Christ is completely reliable.**⁷
 - a. **When we ask, the question of identify, it is not answered in our own self-effort, it is answer in the reality of whom Jesus is.**
 - b. Christ has *the key of David* (cf. Isa. 22:22). *What he opens, no-one can shut; and what he shuts, no-one can open* (cf. Job 12:14). This is the very opposite of caprice. **He acts firmly and none can interfere. He does what he wills.**
 - i. See additional notes on Isa 22:22 connection below.
 2. We may feel as if we have no influence, and that may be the case. But, we are not identified with one who lacks influence, power, or sovereign ability. Instead, we are ultimately identified with the one who is sufficiently influential and able, Jesus. This truth should shape our perspective and help us to endure patiently.

2. Enduring Patiently (vv. 8, 10)

- a. What does Jesus mean by, endure patiently?
 - i. **Enduring faithfully is another way of holding steadfast or living faithfully.** This church had not embraced heretical teaching, nor had it denied Christ's name. Evidently, there had been persecution of some sort, but the people of Philadelphia had stood firm. For those with little strength they had had a noteworthy achievement.
 - ii. V.10 – Jesus continues and helps us to understand what their “work” was... They kept his word about patient endurance.
 1. **“You have kept the word of my endurance” is best understood as referring to “the word about Jesus' own endurance”** in his ministry (objective genitive [τῆς ὑπομονῆς] followed by possessive genitive [μου], though the latter could be genitive of advantage, “for me”). The clause is meant to recall and summarize the clauses in v 8b, “you have kept my word and did not deny my name.”⁸
 - a. I.e., **“You are doing a good job imitating me.”**
 - iii. **Patient endurance is a marker of Christlikeness.**
 1. **Hebrews 12:2 - “Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.”**

⁶ Steve Gregg, *Revelation, Four Views: A Parallel Commentary* (Nashville, TN: T. Nelson Publishers, 1997), 55.

⁷ Leon Morris, *Revelation: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 20, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1987), 80–81.

⁸ G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle, Cumbria: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 1999), 289.

2. **Philippians 2:8** - "And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death— even death on a cross!"
 3. **Isaiah 53:3-5** - "He was despised and rejected by mankind, a man of suffering, and familiar with pain. Like one from whom people hide their faces he was despised, and we held him in low esteem. Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering, yet we considered him punished by God, stricken by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed."
 4. **Matt. 4:1-11 / Lk. 4:1-13** – In these passages Jesus endures temptation in the wilderness.
 5. **John 6:38** - "For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me."
 6. **John 4:34** – "Jesus said to them, "My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to accomplish his work."
- iv. **Don't forget the repeated word, "conquer." (v. 12)**
1. The promises at the end of each section depict the faithful as "conquerors." **This military metaphor assumes that the faithful in each congregation are engaged in a struggle to remain faithful.**⁹
 2. Though it is not specified precisely what is to be overcome, John's other writings speak of both Jesus and the believer overcoming "the world" (John 16:33; 1 John 5:4–5). This implies the continued successful resistance of the world's corrupt moral and spiritual influence.¹⁰
 3. This is not a call to salvation by works. It is a call to persistent faithfulness and focus on the mission.
 - a. I.e., Don't lose sight of the mission and your call.
- v. They have been found faithful by Jesus. →
- b. **The difference between enduring and arguing? → Posture. (v.9)**
- i. When I operate out of my own sense of identity, I am at risk of losing what is dear to me. This forces me to respond differently than if my identity was given to me and I know that it cannot be taken away.
 1. **Think about two children arguing over a toy. Often, it takes an adult to come in and remind the child that owns the toy that it is going to be ok to share, the toy is still theirs.**
 2. This is what is happening here, Jesus is reminding them and us that what has been given to us via him cannot be taken away. And because of that, we do not have to operate in fear or anxiety.
 - ii. **Christ promises that his power, which made it possible for the church to become his people (vv 7–8a) and to maintain their status as his people (vv 8b–9), will continue to protect them spiritually from the tribulation that is about to come.**¹¹
- c. How does it help me look for the eternal perspective?

⁹ Craig R. Koester, *Revelation and the End of All Things*, Second Edition. (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2018), 61.

¹⁰ Steve Gregg, *Revelation, Four Views: A Parallel Commentary* (Nashville, TN: T. Nelson Publishers, 1997), 65.

¹¹ G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle, Cumbria: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 1999), 289.

- i. Because my posture has been shifted, I am now able to look for the eternal perspective not only in my everyday life, but also in my struggles and tribulations.

3. Look for the eternal perspective. (vv.10-11)

a. The difference between a good photographer and me. → Perspective.

- i. In photography, perspective refers to the spatial relationship between objects in a scene and how they appear relative to each other in the final image. It is affected by various factors such as the camera's position, focal length, and angle of view.
 - 1. Overall, perspective is an important aspect of photography as it can greatly influence the look and feel of an image, and the way it is perceived by the viewer.
- ii. **Think about it** – For most of us, we take pictures to be reminded of an experience. It is a very utilitarian experience. When we look at our photos, we remember, but we aren't transported back to the place or the experience. When you look at a professional's images, you get transported back to the experience. That is the power of harnessing perspective.
- iii. Patient endurance / being found faithful – It isn't about just putting your head down and bearing, it is about looking for the eternal perspective and it changes our entire perspective on suffering and hardship. → We see this clearly in the life and writings of Paul.
 - 1. **2 Corinthians 4:8-9** - "We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed."
 - 2. **Romans 5:3-4** - "Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope."
 - 3. **Philippians 4:11-13** - "I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do all this through him who gives me strength."
 - 4. **2 Timothy 2:3** - "Join with me in suffering, like a good soldier of Christ Jesus."
 - 5. **Hebrews 12:1-2** - "Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God."¹²

b. The eternal perspective slows down our anxiety and calms our fears.

- i. *Keep you from (ek) the hour of trial* might mean 'keep you from undergoing the trial' or 'keep you right through the trial'. The Greek is capable of either meaning. The trial is a very thoroughgoing test, for it will *come upon the whole world*, and test *those who live on the earth*. John usually uses this expression to mean the heathen world (see note on

¹² We're not sure if Paul wrote the book of Hebrews. What is clear, is that the book of Hebrews is very Pauline in its structure, themes, and style. So, if it wasn't Paul, it was someone who was influenced deeply (discipled) by Paul.

6:10). Its use here accordingly may be another indication of compassion. The heathen are not simply judged and punished, but tested. God is giving them another opportunity.¹³

1. **Remember, how John describes himself at that beginning...** (1:9) “⁹ I, John, your brother and partner in the tribulation and the kingdom and the patient endurance that are in Jesus, was on the island called Patmos on account of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus.”
2. He is in this with them, and he is modeling for them how they are to live and respond.

c. What does it mean to look for the eternal perspective in my life?

- i. It means that my anxiety is reduced and my expectations are reset.
 1. **Culture & Society:** I am not surprised by culture, nor am I overwhelmed by it. In an increasingly chaotic world, my assurance is not that the kingdom I am living in is going to persist, flourish, or become a utopia, instead, it is that as a member of God’s Kingdom, I know that I am part of something that will not pass away.
 - a. This also allows me to treat and engage my neighbors with grace, love, and empathy, that can lead to truth-centered conversations that speak to felt needs and not political talking points.
 2. **Family:** Particularly when it comes to my kids, my fears for their futures are reduced measurably. Why? Because, I know that as long as they are in Christ, everything after that is gravy (bonus). Yes, careers and vocations are important, but I become much more focused on the people my kids are becoming and less on what they are doing. I.e., Character development over behavioral modification.
 3. **Relationships:** I understand that a relationship cannot fulfill me in the way my relationship with Christ does. This helps me to love others even when they are tough to love and to treat them with grace even when I don’t think they don’t deserve it. In fact, that is the very point of grace, getting something I don’t deserve. Why do I do this? Because I realize how much I have received from Christ already (grace, love, peace). I grow to see my relationships as eternally important.
 4. **Career:** My work becomes less and less about me, my advancement, and even my self-worth. I grow from thinking, I am what I do, to, I’m to honor God in what I do. My ability to make money is now seen as an opportunity to be generous with what the Lord has first provided.
 5. **Identity:** Most centrally, I am able to see the Lord’s hand in and over my life, not just in the good but also in the tough stuff. I experience peace and contentment when everything around me is telling me to be anxious and greedy. Others are able to see the abundant life of Christ flowing from me. Not perfectly, but faithfully.

¹³ Leon Morris, *Revelation: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 20, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1987), 82.

Additional Notes:

The point of the quotation is that Jesus holds the power over salvation and judgment. In 1:18 the stress is on his sovereignty over death and judgment, while in 3:7 the emphasis is on his authority over those entering the kingdom.¹⁴

- Ethnic Israel, which was claiming to be the divine agent wielding the power of salvation and judgment, no longer held this position. Christ's followers could be assured that the doors to the true synagogue were open to them, whereas the doors remained closed to those who rejected Christ.¹⁵
- **Isa. 22:22 is not merely applied analogically here but is understood as an indirect typological prophecy conveyed through Isaiah's historical narration, not as a direct verbal, messianic prophecy.**¹⁶
 - First, whenever David is mentioned in connection with Christ in the NT there are usually discernible prophetic, messianic overtones (e.g., Matt. 1:1; 22:42–45; Mark 11:10; 12:35–37; Luke 1:32; 20:41–44; John 7:42; Acts 2:30–36; 13:34; 15:16; Rom. 1:1–4; 2 Tim. 2:8). The only other occurrences of “house of David” in the NT have the same prophetic nuance (Luke 1:27, 69; so also “tabernacle of David” in Acts 15:16), as do the only remaining references to David in Revelation, both of which are allusions to Isaianic messianic prophecies (Rev. 5:5; 22:16 [cf. Isa. 11:1, 10]).
 - Second, the reference to Eliakim as “my servant” in Isa. 22:20 would have been easily associated with the servant prophecies in Isaiah 40–53, since the phrase occurs there thirteen times (and only twice elsewhere in Isaiah, in reference to the prophet himself [20:3] and to David [37:35]).¹⁷

On the “coming tribulation” – The tribulation is probably to be seen as having universal effect, since it is to come on “the whole inhabited earth” (the same phrase has universal reference in 12:9; 16:14). It may refer to that final period of escalated tribulation depicted in 11:7ff. and 20:8ff., in which universal persecution is unleashed against the church (ὥρα [“hour”] in 17:12 is to be identified with this period). Possibly, the allusion is to the final downfall and judgment of the ungodly world system at Christ's last advent, which is also referred to as occurring in an “hour” (ὥρα; see 11:13; 14:7, 15; 18:10, 17, 19). Or, the period may just as well refer to a trial to come imminently on all in Asia Minor or in the limited known world of that time.¹⁸

¹⁴ G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle, Cumbria: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 1999), 284.

¹⁵ G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle, Cumbria: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 1999), 284.

¹⁶ G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle, Cumbria: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 1999), 284.

¹⁷ G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle, Cumbria: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 1999), 284.

¹⁸ G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle, Cumbria: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 1999), 290.