

I'm coming soon (hold fast)

Learning perseverance from Jesus' message to one church

Message 10: [Under your wings series](#)

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Introduction

On 17 November 2023 when the word of the Lord came to me and he gave me the word for this season including the message: *"I'm coming soon (hold fast)"* I don't think I realized it was a message he had given to the Church of Philadelphia in Revelation 3: 7-13.

More so, I now realize why the message must have resonated with the original hearers when they received it.

The original church of Philadelphia – a name reflecting "brotherly love" was in an earthquake prone area. They used to have so many earth quakes that they would often leave their houses to run outside for safety and to stay in tents or booths during earth quake season!

So when the Lord told them: *"Hold fast to what you have"* or *"The one who overcomes I will make a pillar in the temple of My God, and he will never again leave it"* the language really resonated with them for they must have imagined an earth quake, how the ground shakes and it terrifies and so if you can hold fast to something stable while all around you, the world is falling, you will be okay. The message to this church is to us too for the Spirit is saying:

An earth quake is coming, can you hold fast? Can you faithfully persevere?

If you do, you will become an immovable pillar in the house of God and never ever have to leave again - that's part of the original message, to the Philadelphians. Do you see how it resonated with them?

Becoming an immovable pillar amid earthquakes and tumult, what a promise!

This same promise to them, the Lord Jesus makes to those of us who have taken his name and are counting on him - to hide under his wings.

About me and these series

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me and he anointed me to preach the gospel to everyone telling them that: *"Repent for the Kingdom of Heaven is near (Matthew 3: 2)."*

The Lord chose me from among my brethren to receive his oracles and this message is part 10 of a series called "Under your Wings" which testify about God's great deliverance.

Anchor verse

"To the angel of the church in Philadelphia write: These are the words of the One 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, which no one can

shut. For you have only a little strength, yet you have kept My word and have not denied My name. Look at those who belong to the synagogue of Satan, who claim to be Jews but are liars instead. I will make them come and bow down at your feet, and they will know that I love you. Because you have kept My command to persevere, I will also keep you from the hour of testing that is about to come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth. I am coming soon. Hold fast to what you have, so that no one will take your crown. The one who overcomes I will make a pillar in the temple of My God, and he will never again leave it. Upon him I will write the name of My God, and the name of the city of My God (the new Jerusalem that 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."

Revelation 3:7-13 BSB

Like I shared in the introduction, the message that the Lord Jesus spoke to the original hearers in the Philadelphian church really resonated with them for a few reasons. Some of them are below:

An open door which no one can shut

Philadelphia was a strategically located trade town in Asia Minor – in a region in modern Turkey. It stood between Rome and the eastern world and Philadelphia guarded and commanded an important pass through the mountains between the Hermus and Meander valleys. It was thus the keeper of the key to the door, or gateway, to the eastern highlands, with the power to open and close according to the will of the officials.

Jesus' message thus resonated with them, showing he was the ultimate guardian of a door - luckily for them, he was saying he had opened for them a door.

This statement is similar to Isaiah 22:20-22 where Eliakim is given the key of the house of David: "So he shall open, and no one shall shut; and he shall shut, and no one shall open." Eliakim had the authority to control who had access to David's house and likewise Jesus alone has access to God's house for he alone is the WAY to the father.

Has Jesus opened for you a door? Rejoice because what he opens, NO ONE, not in heaven, not on earth, not under the earth can shut to you:

- the door of your spiritual blessings;
- the door of your financial blessings;
- the door of your marital blessings; or
- the door of your children's blessings.

No door is shut if Jesus opens it for you!

Those who belong to the synagogue of Satan

The Jews of Philadelphia who were persecuting and intimidating the Christians are called a "synagogue of Satan" (3:9), as they were identified in the letter from Jesus to the church in Smyrna (2:9).

The immediate background of the phrase was the claim of the Jews in Philadelphia that they were the true people of God who held the key to the Kingdom of God.

John who wrote the book of revelation under the Spirit contradicts this claim by asserting that the key to the kingdom which had belonged to Israel really belongs to Jesus as the Davidic messiah (5:5; 22:16) and had been forfeited by Israel because she had rejected her Messiah" (A Commentary on the Revelation of John, p. 59).

These Jews, Jesus says, are not really Jews, but lie. What does that mean? It means what Paul meant in Romans 2 when he said no one is a Jew outwardly but inwardly, by the Spirit. These Jews didn't love God. They loved themselves and their power and their status and their self-perceived righteousness. A true Jew would not persecute Christ's church, he would join Christ's church!

These Jews will ultimately have to acknowledge that Christ loves the church. They will recognize that the church is composed of the true people of God, rather than the Jews as a nation. The Christians at Philadelphia would have been greatly encouraged when Christ identified himself as the true Messiah, and as one who controls access to the eternal kingdom. When he opens the door "no one can shut" it – and no one can prevent entry to the people for whom he opens it (3:7).

The local Jewish community of Philadelphia may claim that the kingdom belongs to the Jewish community. But they "are liars" (3:9). Christ has used the key of David to set an open door before the church, not the synagogue. The door to the synagogue may be closed to the Christian; the door to Christ's heavenly kingdom is wide open.

The background for verse 9 is also to be found in the Old Testament, but with an unexpected twist. Isaiah had pictured the victory of Israel over its enemies (60:14). In one place Isaiah said gentile nations would do homage to Israel at the start of the kingdom. "They will bow down before you and plead with you, saying, 'Surely God is with you...'" (Isaiah 45:14).

The imagery of Isaiah bears a striking similarity to Revelation 3:9. But a stunning reversal of fortune has occurred. What the Jews hoped to gain from the gentiles, they themselves must render to the Christians. The Jews in Philadelphia must play the part of the heathen and concede that the church contains the people of God.

I will keep you from the hour of testing.

Philadelphia as I mentioned was subject to frequent and severe earthquakes. One writer declared that: *"no city of Asia Minor suffered more, or so much, from violent and oft-recurring earthquakes,"* Because of this situation the people often fled to the open country and lived in tents or booths in earthquake seasons in order to keep themselves beyond the range of disaster.

Jesus message thus resonated with them because he was showing that when the persecution of the end times come - like earth quake season, then they will be kept safe - as they live in these tents of a body. They will however eventually have a permanent home, as pillars in God's own house where they will no longer be shaken, and more so, no longer need to go outside (to live in booths).

For those of us today who are waiting for the coming of the Lord, we can have hope that he will keep us safe until the day of Christ for the scriptures promise this:

"and it is for this reason that I suffer these things. But I am still full of confidence, because I know whom I have trusted, and I am sure that he is able to keep safe until that Day what he has entrusted to me." 2 Timothy 1:12 GNT

Hold fast to what you have - let no one steal it.

Suffering Smyrna and tried Philadelphia are the only two of the seven churches (of revelation) that received no rebuke, and with Thyatira are the only ones that remain of the original seven.

The present city has a population of about 15,000, a third of whom are professed Christians.

Philadelphia held out against the conquering Turks long after the other cities of Asia, except Smyrna, had fallen. After being besieged by a powerful Ottoman army till the inhabitants were reduced to the verge of starvation, they held out for eleven years before yielding, in AD 1390, surrendering on excellent terms.

The early Philadelphians must have experienced political upheaval over the course of their history and since their founding in 189BC considering its strategic location and so the message of Jesus must have resonated with them and more so even many years after the original message, such as in AD 1390 when they were suffering under the Ottoman siege and had LITTLE strength left.

Their courageous heroism in the face of trouble is something we can learn from.

We can be sure we will be safe under Jesus' wings even during attacks:

"Surely He will deliver you from the snare of the fowler, and from the deadly plague. He will cover you with His feathers; under His wings you will find refuge; His faithfulness is a shield and rampart. You will not fear the terror of the night, nor the arrow that flies by day,"

Psalms 91:3-5 BSB

Even if we go through trouble - such as tribulation and persecution, we shall overcome for he is WITH US, and has already overcome:

"I have told you these things so that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take courage; I have overcome the world!" John 16:33 BSB

What is it about the Philadelphian church that Jesus loved so much?

Jesus loved the Philadelphian church so much that he promised to keep them from the coming persecution or earth quake. Why did he love them so much?

The text tells us some things they did:

1. You have kept my word
2. You have not denied my name
3. You have kept my command to persevere.

The Philadelphians were faithful to the Bible. Their "little strength" led them to rely on the Word and power of God. Others take the position that the reference has to do with their small numbers and material weakness.

Too many Christians today are Bible illiterate - they don't know the wonderful promises in the word and so don't know God's righteous requirements or his wonderful promises. No wonder we are powerless and easily shaken by the enemy.

The Philadelphians were not ashamed to be known as Christians or followers of the WAY.

Too many Christians today in this age where it's about pluralism - you keep your truth and I keep mine, it's all relative... and where all religions seem equal, because of this, they are shamed of admitting they are Christ followers or of explaining the reason for their hope and why Christ is unlike Muhammad or Buddha or Hare Krishna or Bahauallah.

The Philadelphians were not ashamed to suffer for the sake of Christ, to take up their cross and endure - even when faced with trials and tribulations.

Too many Christians don't have strength to withstand persecution and so are like the parable Jesus told, the parable of the sower. They are of the type of seed which falls on hard or rocky ground. Meaning (as Jesus explained):

"The seed sown on rocky ground is the one who hears the word and at once receives it with joy. But since he has no root, he remains for only a season. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, he quickly falls away." Matthew 13:20-21 BSB

We can't overcome or persevere. Why? Because we don't we have roots - those roots being us remaining connected to Christ who is the master plant or the vine.

Are you holding fast?

The Day of Christ or his Second Coming will be that he comes like a thief in the night.

It will be just like the days of Noah, which means - until the flood came, no one knew it was coming. Some were being given in marriage, some were drinking and getting drunk and so of course no one knew, except Noah and his family because they had been WARNED, so they escaped the flood!

"No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. As it was in the days of Noah, so will it be at the coming of the Son of Man. For in the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day Noah entered the ark. And they were oblivious, until the flood came and swept them all away. So will it be at the coming of the Son of Man." Matthew 24:36-39 BSB

The only way you can escape the suffering that will come to the world prior to Jesus' coming is to be spiritually sensitive and this starts with reading the word of God - the Bible, just like the Philadelphians.

This faith in the word must have given the Philadelphians courage and hope so that they don't deny his name and then have the faith to endure suffering, knowing that this tent is a temporary home - but we have a permanent city, whose maker is God; that we have a mansion in the father's house and because of that; we overcome.

For us, this belief in the Bible will make us ever ready - such that whether our Lord comes today or tomorrow, for we do not know the hour; we shall be ready.

The message of Christ also shows that a "Philadelphian type church" will be in place at the time of Christ for the word says:

“Because you have kept My command to persevere, I will also keep you from the hour of testing that is about to come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth. I am coming soon. Hold fast to what you have, so that no one will take your crown.”

Revelation 3:10-11 BSB

This tells us that just before Jesus’ return there will be persecution or an “hour of testing.” This testing will likely cause some to “fall away” if they don’t persevere.

Only those who hold on, hold fast to the promises will be able to receive the reward for there is no reward for the quitter.

Will you be ready and will you be holding fast at the coming of our Lord? If not, learn from the example of the Philadelphians.

For their faithfulness they will be a pillar and receive a new name.

One writer says that: "in Apostolic days, pillars were erected to rulers and generals with testimonies of their accomplishments chiseled upon them."

Another says: Asian temples were built to withstand severe earthquakes. Their foundations were laid on beds of charcoal covered with wool fleeces, which caused the structure to "float" on the soil like a raft. Each block was joined to another by metal cramps, so that the platform was a unity. The temple would be the most secure structure in the city, hence the promise to be a pillar in the temple of God was one of security and safety. Inscribed pillars are found throughout Aegean Turkey. A dramatic example is the temple of Zeus at Euromos with dedicatory inscriptions on ten of the eleven standing pillars. Jesus will write divine names as well as his new name on those human "pillars" who overcome.

The Philadelphians must have known of the honour which comes to the victorious one.

Philadelphia was also told not to let any person take its crown. In both cases, the word is *stephanos* – which refers to the wreath of victory awarded to winners of athletic contests. This would have been a meaningful word to the church in Philadelphia, as the city was famous for its athletic games.

As for a new name, what does the message mean?

When Jacob’s character was changed the Lord changed his name, for the purpose of a name is to describe the character. The New Jerusalem is the capital city of the renewed kingdom, on whose throne will sit the Son of David. The overcomer will be a citizen of that kingdom forever. In that city the names of all its citizens are enrolled. (Heb. 12:22, 23.) With the name of God and the name of the city of God written on the overcomer.

The Philadelphians must have also understood that after the victory, they were becoming a citizen of a new city, a heavenly city and thus received a new name. How amazing!

He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit is saying to the Churches!

Notes/references

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