

• *The sixth letter to Philadelphia*

• *Command and description (i) & (ii)*

1. *Jesus has the key to the temple of God*

• *Jesus is the head of the church*

• *he has the power to open and close opportunities to serve Him in His kingdom*

2. *Jesus approves of faithful churches (iii)*

• *Jesus had no word of criticism for this church (iv)*

• *It was faithful although it was without power*

• *A despised minority*

• *But they stayed true to God*

Each description of Jesus in these seven letters to the churches is taken from the vision of the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ which has already been described<sup>1</sup>. The same thing is true in Revelation 3:7 although less conspicuously. In the sixth of these letters we again begin with (i) a command and (ii) a description which picks up phrases in 1:5, 18. <sup>7</sup>*To the angel of the church in Philadelphia write: The words of the one who is holy, the one who is true. He holds the key of David. He opens doors, and then no one will shut them; he closes doors, and no one will open them.*'

1. **Jesus has the key to the temple of God.** In the life of the churches we must always remember that we are dealing with the sovereign power of the Lord Jesus Christ. He is the Head of the church. He and no one else! We must remember his character; he is holy and true. He will never do anything which is evil. He will never deceive or be unfaithful. Jesus has the key to the churches. The picture-language is taken from Isaiah 22:22 where the key, the robe and the sash are the symbols of power and authority. Jesus has the power of salvation. He and he alone is the One who gives eternal life. He has the power of judgement. And (the most important thing here) he has the power to open and close opportunities to serve him in his kingdom. If we simply obey him faithfully he will give us the high privilege of opening up opportunities to serve him. If we are unfaithful those opportunities will close down and nothing we do will be able to truly open them again (although I do not mean that **all** closed doors are a mark of unfaithfulness). Jesus is God's Servant building his temple consisting of living stones. He will not give us the keys but he will open the doors for us.

2. **Jesus approves of faithful churches.** Most of the seven letters follow on with (iii) a word of commendation, (iv) a word of criticism, (v) an exhortation to repentance, (vi) an appeal that the message should be heard, (vii) a promise to those who conquer. But in the case of the church at Philadelphia Jesus has no word of criticism. Imagine being part of a congregation concerning which Jesus has no criticism! I don't suppose it was totally faultless, but it was basically a faithful church and Jesus approves of it. It is an invitation to us to seek to be a people and part of a congregation which is 'blameless' – free from obvious defects, living conscientiously in this world. Jesus approved of this church because it was faithful.

**It was faithful although it was without power.** <sup>8</sup>*I know your works. Look, I have given you in front of you a door that has been opened, and that no one will be able to close. I did it because you have only a little power, but you kept my word, and you did not deny my name.*' The Philadelphians had 'only a little power'. It means that they were not powerfully influential people in their community. They had no members who were influential in the Roman government. They were a despised minority proclaiming a despised Saviour. But they remained true to what God had done in their lives, and they continued to insist everywhere that Jesus was the risen Saviour. Despite their being a small community of despised people they stayed true to what they knew of God and his salvation.

<sup>1</sup> in 1:11-20

• *Faithful to God's Word – the entire Biblical message*

**The church was faithful to God's Word.** 'You kept my word,' said Jesus. God's 'Word' is his total revelation of the gospel-message of salvation. In practical terms, it means the entire biblical message preached in the power of the Holy Spirit. There are many who get very excited about personal revelations that they will be blessed in this way or that way. What excited the Philadelphians was the **entire** message of salvation for the nations.

• *Faithful to God's name – gripped with the character of the Lord Jesus Christ*

**The church was faithful to God's name.** God's name is his revealed character. The Philadelphians remembered that God is God, and they spoke and lived accordingly. We are to be gripped with the character of the Lord Jesus Christ. Because God is spirit, we worship him in spirit and in truth. Because God is holy, we are to be holy. Because he created the universe with his outstretched hand, we trust him. Because Jesus died on the cross, we proclaim his cross as the only hope for the world. We hold to Jesus' name. We insist that there is no other name under heaven or anywhere else by which men and women can come to salvation.

• *Faced strong opposition from ethnic (but faithless) Jews*

No matter what happened to them, the Philadelphians remained faithful in insisting that Jesus is the only Saviour. They faced much opposition, it seems, from Jewish people. <sup>9</sup>*'Look, I will make those people who come from the "synagogue of Satan" (as we call it) – who say they are Jews and they are not but are liars – I will make them come and fall down at your feet and acknowledge that I have loved you.'* There were unbelieving Jewish people in Philadelphia who were persecuting the Christians with demonic forcefulness. John calls them the 'synagogue of Satan'. They were ethnic Jews but they were not true children of Abraham because they did not have faith in Jesus. The true seed of Abraham are those who have faith in Jesus<sup>11</sup>.

<sup>11</sup> see Galatians 3:29

**3. God will richly reward a faithful church**

**3. God will richly reward a faithful church.** He will give them opportunities to serve him (as Jesus has already said). He will give them conversions (which is what the end of verse 9 means). But there is more. He will give them **protection**. <sup>10</sup>*'Since you have kept my command that you should endure I also will keep you . . .'* Christians who endure to the end of whatever trial God puts them through will find that God keeps them safe, in one way or another.

• *Conversion and protection*



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