

Lesson # 9 -- The People of Jesus Christ at Philadelphia.

Introduction

- A. One evidence that the Bible is the inspired Word from God is seen in the way the Scripture ministers to the needs of Christians in all ages. In our study of these letters to the churches we have continually found ourselves convicted, instructed, and encouraged.
- B. As we understand this truth we see the design God had in mind in giving us the Bible. When we learn to interpret the Scripture correctly every part of it has something to say to us.
- C. We cannot read these seven letters to the churches without gaining a deep understanding of the love of God for His people. We see His love in how He speaks of Himself, in His commendation, counsel, warnings, and promises. In God love and action are never separated.

I. The Introduction to the Church at Philadelphia.

- A. The city of Philadelphia was located about 25 miles southeast of Sardis. She was built by King Attalus II (159-138 B.C.) and was named "Philadelphus" (Greek for "one who loves his brother") in honor of his brother Eumenes.
- B. The city was built by King Attalus so it could be the means of spreading the Greek language and culture throughout the eastern part of Lydia and Phrygia. Her location was chosen with this design in mind. She was on the border of these provinces, on an important trade route, and in a section of the county where the soil was highly productive for the growing of grapes.
- C. Philadelphia had a long history of being destroyed by earthquakes. One of the most serious occurred in 17 A.D. From that time on she continued to suffer ground tremors. The city was rebuilt a number of times by the various governmental leaders of the area with each changing her name to point out their good works. Today the city is called Alasehir.
- D. The Scripture: Revelation 3:7-13.

II. The Titles of the Lord Jesus.

And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write, These things saith he that is holy, he that is true, he that hath the key of David, he that openeth, and no man shutteth, and shutteth, and no man openeth.

A. The explanation of these titles.

1. The first title: "He that is holy."

The word "holy" indicates one of the most important attributes of God. It is a reminder that He is qualitatively different from us. Holiness, when spoken of God, is more than mere separation from sin -- it is His self-affirming purity -- it speaks of the truth that He is the fullness of all the attributes. It is this, and much more, that is emphasized when the angels sing to God, "Holy, Holy, Holy." Isaiah 6:3; Rev. 4:8

2. The second title: "He that is true."

When spoken of God the word "true" refers to at least two very important facets of His person. The first is that He is the source of all truth (John 14:6) and the second is that He always acts in harmony with truth and is therefore faithful (I Cor. 1:9). When the Lord Jesus spoke of Himself as "True" He reminded the Christians at Philadelphia that what He said was the truth and that He would always keep His Word.

3. The third title: "He that hath the key of David, he that openeth, and no man shutteth; and shutteth, and no man openeth."

A key is a symbol of authority. To have "the key of David" is to have authoritative right in regard to the promises of the Messiah. The words "open" and "shut" in the rest of the title speak of applying this authority. It is a reminder that the Lord Jesus alone is the "way, the truth, and the life" John 14:6. (Note the use of this title in Isaiah 22:22.)

B. The application of these titles.

1. The holiness and faithfulness of God are the foundation stones of our life of faith and trust. Knowing these characteristics of God's character we can trust Him -- because He is absolutely trustworthy. His holiness means that He will always do what is righteous and His faithfulness means that He will always act in harmony with truth. No greater assurance can be found.

2. These titles indicate to each of us the serious nature of our doubt and unbelief. When we read of a promise God has made to us, and fail to claim it by faith and obey God, we are committing a terrible sin against God's character. We are saying, by our actions -- "I don't trust You to keep Your Word. I don't believe You are wise enough and powerful enough to do what You have promised." We must stop living like this!

3. When the Lord Jesus spoke to the believers in Philadelphia and told them He had the "Key of David" He was reminding them of His loving provision for them as well as His sovereign control. This message is also for us today. All the fullness of the kingdom of God, as applied to us today, comes to us through the relationship of grace He has established with us. In Acts 13 Paul summarized what he called "the mercies of David" by use of the words "forgiveness of sins" and "justified from all things." Every believer has been brought into the Kingdom of God by the Lord Jesus, whose very name is "The Door" (John 10:9) and has been given complete forgiveness and righteousness (justification) (Col. 2:13; Rom. 5:1; 8:1).
4. At least one more thought is emphasized in these titles. It has to do with the words "open and shut." By this title the Savior indicates His sovereign control of all things. He reminded the believers in Philadelphia and in every age that He had the power to carry out His plan and to "work all things for their good." We can do the will of God, not only because of the spiritual ability He has given to us, but because we belong to the One Who is the Author of history.

III. The Commendation of the Lord Jesus.

I know thy works. Behold I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it, for thou hast a little strength, and hast kept my word, and hast not denied by name. Rev 3:8

A. The explanation of this commendation.

1. His approval of their service and manner of life.

The believers at Philadelphia had been living in harmony with the titles of the Savior and here He commends them for it. The "open door" indicates the opportunities for service that He had given to them (I Cor. 16:9; II Cor. 2:12; Col. 4:3). They had been concerned about carrying out the Great Commission in their area. Although their strength was small they had put it to use by obeying His Word and living in harmony with His name.

2. His threefold promise.

a. The first promise.

Behold, I will make them of the synagogue of Satan, which say they are Jews, and are not, but do lie, behold, I will make them to come and worship before thy feet, and to know that I have loved thee. Rev. 3:9

These words indicate the seriousness of the opposition the believers in Philadelphia were receiving. Those who were working against them are called "the synagogue of Satan." They were a religious group still holding to some form of Old Testament worship. The Savior promised they would have to acknowledge that His church was genuine and confess that He loved the members of His church.

b. The second promise.

Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth.
Rev. 3:10

In this promise to the believers at Philadelphia we have an example of the sovereignty of the Lord Jesus. He indicates in this verse that a day will come when a time of severe trial will come upon the world as a test or judgment of all non-Christians. This period of time is often spoken of in the Bible (Matt. 24:21-26; Rev. 7:13,14). What the Savior is saying to these saints and to all believers is that when this time of judgment comes upon non-believers -- they will not be here on earth. Johnson states, in his book on Revelation, "The most natural way to understand the expression 'kept from' the hour of something that will be worldwide is not 'to be preserved through it,' but 'to be kept from being present when it happens.'" (P. 60)

c. The third promise.

Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out, and I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, which is New Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from my God, and I will write upon him my new name. Rev. 3:12

These unusual words indicate the great honor that is in store for the true believer in Jesus Christ. To be likened to a pillar in God's temple is to be promised an unusual place of prominence and privilege. And to have the name of God, of the New Jerusalem, and the new name of the Savior written upon one signifies divine recognition and ownership. No believer could ever imagine such a position of respect and dignity -- but that is the promise of the Lord Jesus to the overcomer.

3. His exhortation.

Behold, I come quickly. Hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown. Rev. 3:11

The way believers are to escape the judgment coming upon the non-Christians is through Jesus Christ coming for them. In this verse He joins that promise with an exhortation. The Word of God speaks of a time, yet future, when the Savior will call all believers into His presence (I Thess. 4:14-18). Once the rapture of the church occurs the judgment will begin.

Our attitude today is to be the same as that enjoined upon the believers in Philadelphia -- daily expect His coming. This is the true meaning of the believer's hope. While waiting for His coming the saints were to "hold fast" to the priorities and goals that were the basis of their obedience. They were to be careful lest they would fall into neglect and worldliness and thereby lose their crown of reward.

B. The application of this commendation.

1. When we look at the three-fold promise given to the Christians at Philadelphia we find they applied to their present (I will cause the non-believers to confess your genuineness), to their near future (I will keep you from the tribulation), and to their remote future in glory (I will make you a pillar in my temple).
2. One of the areas many people dread -- is the future. In these passages the Lord Jesus is asking us to commit our future to Him in an act of faith. He wants us to know that He will be true to His Word. (Note Rom. 8:28; Phil. 4:19; Heb. 13:5.)
3. The attitude of the true Christian is that of expecting the coming of the Savior at any time. We do not know when He will return -- but we are to live in anticipation and with expectancy.
4. Because of our sinful nature and the constant temptation to give in to some form of worldliness -- we must be on our guard. How we live does make a difference now and in the future.