The Faithful Church At Philadelphia.

Text: Rev 3:7-13

Suggested Hymns:
501, 488, 340, 292, 178

1) I Know Your Works
2) Opportunities Presented
3) Protection Promised
4) The Ultimate Promise Of Christ

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is Revelation 3:7–13, [7] ***"And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write, 'These things says He who is holy, He who is true, "He who has the key of David, He who opens and no one shuts, and shuts and no one opens."***

[8] ***"I know your works. See, I have set before you an open door, and no one can shut it; for you have a little strength, have kept My word, and have not denied My name.*** [9] ***Indeed I will make those of the synagogue of Satan, who say they are Jews and are not, but lie — indeed I will make them come and worship before your feet, and to know that I have loved you.***

[10] ***Because you have kept My command to persevere, I also will keep you from the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth.***

[11] ***Behold, I am coming quickly! Hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown.*** [12] ***He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he shall go out no more. 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 I will write on him My new name.***

[13] ***"He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."'*** (NKJV)

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

More than sixty years had passed since Jesus had withdrawn His visible presence from the small circle of disciples who had been

commissioned as His Apostles, having commanded them to carry the message of the Atonement into a sin-cursed world.

For over sixty years this work had prospered. Churches had been established even in remote regions. But it was not done without obstacles and hindrances. Blood-stained persecutions were the order of the day, which, during these sixty years, resulted in the violent death, the martyr's death, of all but one of the original Apostles of the Lord. That one was John.

Although his life had been spared, his experiences certainly were far from pleasant. Tradition has it that in the course of persecutions raised against him he was thrown into hot oil, thus to subject him to death by torture.

When he, however, contrary to expectations, survived this ordeal, he was sent into exile on the lonely island of Patmos, off the mainland of Asia Minor. There in his loneliness the Lord appeared to him with special revelations and messages, which he in turn was to convey to the "seven churches" in Asia Minor.

The Lord here offers an appraisal of the work done by the congregations, which should serve, on the one hand, to encourage the faithful, and on the other hand, to arouse the fainthearted and those who were remiss and negligent in their Christian duties.

We also, as a congregation, should repeatedly make use of opportunities to "search and try our ways." And in making such an appraisal we would find no lasting degree of satisfaction in the commendation and praises of men; neither could we be satisfied with a mere recounting of achievements and successes in the past.

Rather we should naturally be concerned and have an interest in Christ's estimate of our past efforts, and be reminded of His expectations concerning us, and of the promises He offers us for the future.

With that purpose in mind, let us meditate on *The Faithful Church at Philadelphia*. May the Lord bless our meditation.

1. "I Know Your Works"

The first statement of the glorified Lord to the church at Philadelphia, to which our attention is directed, relates to the past: "***I know your works***" — "***[You] have kept My word, and have not denied My name***."

Yes, Jesus has an intense interest not only in the general work and progress of the church at large, but He watches the life and activity of each congregation, yes, of each individual Christian!

"***I know your works***," He says. He knows whether they are good or bad, approved or rejected. Before Him there is no such thing as "getting by."

The church of Laodicea, for example, did not get by with its disinterest and its lukewarmness in the work of the Lord! Christ knew its attitude and states, ***[15] "I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot. [16] So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth.***[1]

But the Lord's aim is not only to criticise, but the Lord also praises and commends where the attitude and the work has been praiseworthy and commendable. So here, He praises in the words, "[You] ***have kept My word***."

Keeping Christ's Word. — Christ's Word has been given as a charge or trust to His disciples with the explicit instruction that they are to ***"teach them*** *[that is - all nations, all people]* ***to observe all things that I have commanded you."***[2]

That comprises the whole of God's revelation, the fearless reference to sin and transgression without respect of persons, but especially the comforting doctrine of the grace of God in Christ Jesus, in whom God has reconciled the world to Himself, and bids people through faith in their Redeemer to become partakers of the privilege of adoption as "children of God."[3]

Christ's Word, which is to be observed, addresses itself also to those who have been gained for the Christian faith. Their works are to be the constant evidence and living proof of the inward change which has been brought about through their regeneration.

To them He says, ***"This is the will of God, even your sanctification."***[4] This Word of God must not only be accepted in its completeness and purity, but must also be applied and observed as the guideline and rule of the daily life even in the face of persecution and ridicule. What a blessed privilege it is, after having

fought the battle of faith, to be commended by the Lord: ***"I know your works," "You have kept My Word"!***

We realise that this is something which is not within our power to perform, but it is accomplished through the gracious guidance of the Holy Spirit in our midst. It is, therefore, without the slightest degree of self-glorification or boasting that we say: *You have kept the Word of God in its truth and purity, you have not denied Christ's name.*

2. Opportunities Presented

In consequence of this commendable attitude of the congregation of Philadelphia, Christ adds some remarkable promises.

Note the promise, "***See, I have set before you an open door.***" An open door is symbolic of wonderful opportunities. This door is the grace of God as revealed to us in His Word. It stands wide open.

Every sinner is invited to come from the wilderness of sin and the bonds of slavery through this open door into the shelter of Zion. Having themselves entered this door of grace, these Christians are now given the opportunity of pointing out that "open door" to their fellow men still lost in the maze of sin.

That, to be sure, is a very difficult task, for ***"the carnal mind is enmity against God,"***[5] and ***"the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him."***[6] Indeed, they are outspoken and determined in their opposition. Jesus designates them as being ***"of the synagog of Satan."***[7]

And yet, among these opponents, whether Jew or Gentile, there is the open door of grace and opportunity offered to the Church, of which Jesus says that "***no one shuts***." Through the continued faithful testimony of the believers the Church shall expand and shall experience the fulfilment of the assurance of Christ, "***indeed I will make them come and worship before your feet, and to know that I have loved you***."

Oh, that we could be all the more conscious of the fact that this is the real purpose of our existence as a congregation, and as members of our church body, to show to others in our own community, as well as to those in distant quarters of

the world the open door of grace with its invitation, as written in Matthew 11:28, [28] ***Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.***

According to His promise God has added His blessing to this our work in the past, and He will certainly continue to do so in the future.

3. Protection Promised

Our text proceeds, "***I also will keep you from the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth.***"

This is another promise and reward to the Christians of Philadelphia for their faithfulness to Christ. "***I also will keep you***" — what a blessed promise! It is the promise of God who ***"is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it."***[8]

It is only natural that, owing to the violent opposition of the devil and the world to the work of the Church, they will use extraordinary means to afflict and to try the believers. Such afflictions the Church had already experienced in the blood-stained persecutions under the Roman emperors, which had been carried on already for a number of years and were soon to be renewed with even greater violence.

What a trial that presented! The Christians were placed with the alternative: '*Confess and die' or 'deny and live!'* How difficult it would be to face that alternative! And yet, these Christians had nothing to fear, for Jesus had promised: "***I also will keep you***" — I will stand by your side with the encouragement of My Word and will not permit the temporal afflictions and tribulations to become so severe that your faithfulness would be endangered in that way.

"***I also will keep you***" — this would enable the Christians heroically and confidently to say, ***"Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; For You are with me."***[9]

Our Afflictions — Our Promise. — In our lifetime we have not experienced such great afflictions as those persecutions in our country. Nevertheless, there has been no lack of fightings and fears within and without, which make perseverance very difficult.

Such trials and tribulations are the special portion of the true Church of Christ here on earth. Wherever God's pure and unadulterated Word is proclaimed, it meets with contradiction, contempt, hatred, and persecution.

But is it also noteworthy that in our text Jesus speaks of a certain hour of temptation, saying, "***I also will keep you from the hour of trial***"? Is not Jesus thinking of the special hour of tribulation which the Church must experience before the end of time?

It is the season in which Satan is loosed for a time, the days when we shall hear of wars and rumours of wars, of nation rising against nation, vying with one another for spheres of influence and domination, the time when we shall be shocked by reports of earthquakes, violent and destructive storms, famines, and pestilences.

When we now note the fears that prevail, as to what might happen to civilisation if the nations would become involved in atomic warfare; when we note the spread of powerful ideologies, be it communism, Islam, or something else, threatening to assume world-wide control, can we then doubt that this is the hour of tribulation which shall become so severe, that unless those days should be shortened, no flesh could be saved!"

Does that make you shudder? Have you not been called into the Church of Christ for such a time as this? He who says: ***"I know your works," "You have kept My command to persevere,"*** encourages you to go forward in this outlined course, assured that He "***will keep you from the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world***," and knowing that "***even the gates of hell shall not prevail***" against you.[10] That is the prospect for the future.

4. The Ultimate Promise Of Christ

We are also encouraged in such faithful perseverance by the ultimate promise of Christ, [11] ***Behold, I am coming quickly! Hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown.***

The days of tribulation herald the Second Advent of our Lord. We must never lose sight of that hope. It should cause you to cling all the more firmly to what you now have — the Word of truth, and your faith in that Word. Clinging to this, no person will be able to take from you your crown, that is eternal life.

Let us, then, confidently and courageously continue in the work which we have been called, devoting ourselves wholeheartedly to this work while it is day, seeing ***"the night is coming, when no man can work."***[11]

May our faith and our zeal increase while we are still engaged in the work of the Church Militant, so that in the consummation of the Church Triumphant, when we and all the elect shall be gathered before the throne of God, our Lord may still commend us, saying, ***"I know your works; you have kept My word, and have not denied My name; I will give you the crown of life."*** Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

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[1] Revelation 3:15–16
[2] Matthew 28:18
[3] Rom. 8:15, Gal. 4:5
[4] 1 Thessalonians 4:3
[5] Romans 8:7
[6] 1 Corinthians 2:14
[7] Verse 9
[8] 1 Corinthians 10:13
[9] Psa. 23:4
[10] Matthew 16:18
[11] John 9:4